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ABSTRACT

This issue of "Media & Values" provides essays and teaching ideas for addressing the influence of television in society. Articles in this issue include: (1) "Wrestling with Television" (Elizabeth Thoman); (2) "Comics and Culture" (Rosalind Silver); (3) "Society's Storyteller" (George Gerbner); (4) "Five Important Ideas to Teach Your Kids about TV" (Jay Davis); (5) "Balancing Bias in the News" (Pat Hynds); (6) "Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore" (Elayne Rapping); (7) "Home, Home on the Remote" (James Lull); (8) "I'll Be Home for Hanukkah" (Rosalind Silver); (9) "It's a Whole New Ball Game" (Stuart Showalter); (10) "Decoding MTV" (Jeff Kellam); (11) "Sex and Consequences" (Dan Wakefield); (12) "Muktuk and Mass Media" (Eric Gabster); (13) "All in the Family: How to Transform a TV Takeover" (Barbara Osborn); (14) "Resources for Follow-up"; and (15) "Living with Television: Where We Go From Here." (EH)

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Media&Values

A Cornerstone of the Media Literacy Movement

ED 408 215

TUNING IN TO TELEVISION:
News, Views and How to Live With It

For Better or For Worse

SO 027 292

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Society's Storyteller p. 8
Home, Home on the Remote p. 21

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15th Anniversary Issue

Media&Values

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Media&Values is published quarterly by the Center for Media and Values, an educational not-for-profit membership organization which empowers the public by providing resources for critical awareness about media. The Center believes that a concern for values in today's media age is not so much knowing all the answers as asking the right questions.

In addition to publishing *Media&Values*, the Center creates educational curriculum materials for local use, organizes forums and conferences, and maintains an information and resource center on the media issues of our time. Funding for the Center comes from subscriptions and memberships along with individual donations, foundation grants and organizational co-sponsorships.

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Issue Dedication

This anniversary issue of *Media&Values* magazine is dedicated to the memories of **Richard Byrne, Ph.D.** in whose graduate seminar at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication, *Media&Values* was developed as a class project. And **Marjorie Tuite, OP**, whose life commitment to social justice influenced so many to challenge—and change—the status quo.

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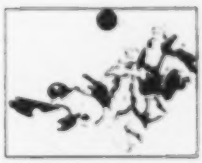

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WRESTLING WITH TELEVISION:

Fifteen Years of Cutting Edge Criticism

By Elizabeth Thoman

There's a provocative new book currently making the rounds by a man who, aided by a host of friends with VCRs, watched all 24 hours of TV programming sent out on May 3, 1990 on the 93 channels of the nation's largest cable system.

He then compared it to the knowledge he gained from spending 24 hours on a mountain near his Adirondack home.

What we learn from TV land pales by comparison, of course, to the experience of living in the woods even for one day. But *The Age of Missing Information* by Bill McKibben is not just another diatribe of television-bashing.

More perceptively, he challenges the myth of television as the herald of the so-called "information revolution." "What do we really need to 'know' about the world we live in?" asks this modern Thoreau.

We may have enough facts to qualify us as candidates for *Jeopardy*, but can we create a life-sustaining culture and ecology, he asks, without the vital lessons of nature and face-to-face community.

Through television we are privy to both the profound and the mundane. And therein lies our struggle. How do we differentiate (and teach our young to differentiate) between what is significant and what is trivial in this seemingly endless stream of "information?"

McKibben's view of this process is full of insights not just about television but, more importantly, about ourselves. In reading it (and I do recommend it), long-time readers of *Media&Values* magazine may experience a satisfying sense of *deja-vu*.

Indeed, if you look on page 30, you'll discover a wonderful little essay by Tyrone Cashman that provides the same insight about how TV "flattens" our experiences that McKibben does. Published in our Spring 1990 issue, it was available to *Media&Values* readers before McKibben even embarked on his now best-selling cultural experiment.

But that's not the only cutting edge piece *Media&Values* published in its first 15 years. Throughout the 40 pages of this special Anniversary Issue you'll find dozens of articles, sidebars and action items that are just as relevant today as when they were first published.

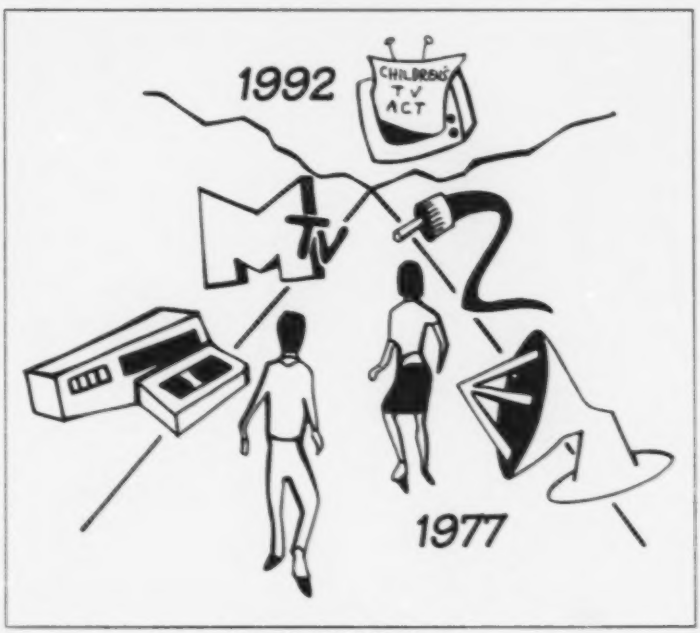

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN SANTOS

Some amazingly so—such as the famous "Home, Home on the Remote" article that first spotlighted early research documenting how and why males all over the world dominate TV remote control devices. (It's still our most talked-about article.)

Or screenwriter Dan Wakefield's thoughtful 1989 interview on television sexuality, which predated by several years the "Murphy Brown" debate now in vogue.

Or Jay Davis' insightful "Five Important Ideas to Teach Your Kids about TV" which, in 1990, took the issue of children and television to a new and deeper level.

Or the classic essay on television as storyteller by media researcher George Gerbner—first published in 1981!

We chose the theme of television for this special anniversary issue because—even though *Media&Values* tries to cover a variety of media—television, by far, has been the most influential media force during these past 15 years.

Today television does more than just "broadcast" news and entertainment. Cable proliferates alternative media choices...on television. VCRs sell consumerism to developing cultures...on a TV screen. CNN covers the world...on television. MTV reshapes images and lifestyles...on a television music channel.

In the premiere issue of *Media&Values*, published in the fall of 1977, we asked, "What is this 'thing' which has intruded itself so totally on our society in less than a lifetime? How do we cope with human life in which the common values no longer seem to be articulated by the Ten Commandments, but by hundreds of thousands of TV commercials?"

Fifteen years later, we are just beginning to understand the full significance of those questions. Does this mean we've failed? That the first 15 years of *Media&Values* accomplished nothing?

On the contrary. In 1977, we could only vaguely identify a few obvious questions. Now in 1992, we're beginning to find some solutions to the many complex issues created by a fast-growing, consumer-based media culture.

One solution we discovered along the way is the movement for media literacy education. Pioneered in the '70s and '80s by researchers and teachers in Australia, Europe, England and Canada, media literacy education offers a *new way of thinking* about television and mass media and *new skills of active engagement and critical reflection* with the media world that surrounds us all.

We are proud that, over the past 15 years, *Media&Values* has been a beacon for guiding media literacy education to the U.S.

At first we thought that publishing a magazine would be enough. Then, at our 10th Anniversary, we did some long-range planning and realized more was needed. So we reorganized as the Center for Media and Values in 1989 and expanded each issue's theme into a Media Literacy Workshop Kit™ to provide simple but creative teaching/learning tools for schools, religious groups and community organizations. Last year we added videos, and future plans call for developing additional resources for both youth and adult groups. (See page 40.)

Our goal from the beginning of *Media&Values* was to help define and refine the field of media education by providing a forum for discussion of the many values issues raised by a media culture: not just "sex and violence" (although these are important issues) but also the more systemic issue of the media's economic underpinning, which symbiotically drives the consumer culture.

By *making obvious the connections* between the global media system and our own very ordinary lives, we hoped to be able to see more clearly our way through the forest—and hopefully simplify the path for others to follow.

We are extremely grateful to the far-too-numerous-to-name writers and researchers, artists and illustrators who so generously cooperated in bringing each issue, including this one, to birth. Most freely volunteered their work. All provided invaluable contributions that not only allowed *Media&Values* to survive many years of being a voice in the wilderness—but more importantly, crafted a *vision* of something called "media awareness" into the *reality* of a nationwide movement for media literacy education.

Throughout the 40 pages of this special anniversary issue you'll find dozens of articles, sidebars and action items that are just as relevant today as when they were first published.

Ultimately this issue is a tribute to both our writers and our readers over the years, all of them *people who care*...about the future of our culture...about the values that will sustain our children's children...about the strengthening of democracy everywhere in a world increasingly dominated by the mass media.

Lest we forget, however, that lectures are less effective than laughter, we begin our Anniversary Issue on *Tuning in to Television* with one original article. It interviews the people we consider some of today's most perceptive TV critics—the women and men who use television as a tool for commentary in their daily comic strips. As Zippy the Pinhead, Bill Griffith's media obsessed cartoon character, would say, "I view, therefore I am."

Elizabeth Thoman is executive director of the Center for Media and Values, and founded Media&Values *magazine in 1977.*

Help Celebrate Our Fifteenth Anniversary!

We may not be able to change the FACT that people watch TV but we can change the WAY they watch it.

In celebrating this 15th Anniversary of *Media&Values* magazine, all of us at the Center for Media and Values pledge to continue pursuing the vision of media literacy education until every school system, church/synagogue and community organization incorporates media literacy principles and practices as part of their classroom curriculum or educational agenda.

But we cannot do it alone.

Now, more than ever, we need subscribers and members, volunteers and donors, to spread the word and support the cause.

To help the Center move securely into the future, the Board of Directors, at their fall, 1992 meeting, established a 15th Anniversary Development Campaign to raise a modest reserve fund and revolving new-projects development budget of $75,000. There are three ways you can help:

1. **If you're not already a member of the Center, do join!** Members make a movement grow! Membership details on inside back cover.
2. **Make a generous contribution to our 15th Anniversary Development Campaign.** Help fund the future of media literacy in the U.S. Use the envelope provided in this issue or send your contribution to the Center directly.
3. **Spread the word about media literacy, and the work of the Center, to others who can join or support our work.** Make copies of the inside back cover and distribute them to friends and colleagues, at conferences and workshops.

The Campaign will extend from the publication of this issue through May 1993 when we plan to culminate with an Anniversary Celebration in the Los Angeles area. Members will receive full details as they develop. Thank you for your participation and support.

Judy Thompson
President, Board of Directors

COMICS AND CULTURE:
Cartoonists' Role as TV Critics

By Rosalind Silver

Calvin and Hobbes **by Bill Watterson**

OH, GREAT ALTAR OF PASSIVE ENTERTAINMENT...
BESTOW UPON ME THY DISCORDANT IMAGES AT SUCH SPEED AS TO RENDER LINEAR THOUGHT IMPOSSIBLE!

CALVIN AND HOBBES COPYRIGHT 1990 WATTERSON. REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION OF UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

A mother comes into the family room where her son is watching a noisy action/adventure show with his school books spread across his lap.

"Michael, how can you watch TV and do your homework at the same time? Homework is important! It should be taken seriously! And seriously means giving it your undivided attention." Without replying, the teenage boy moves slowly and reluctantly out of the living room and upstairs to his room—where he turns on his boom box before returning to his books.

A real-life conversation? Or perhaps the beginning of a movie or a TV sitcom?

But the dialogue actually reflects the everyday realism of an older medium. This typical parent-child struggle appeared in the first few panels of one Sunday serial of *For Better or For Worse*, a syndicated cartoon strip by Lynn Johnston that recounts the day to day life of the Patterson family.

Michael and Elly Patterson, the mother and son in *For Better or For Worse*, aren't alone. In the same Sunday comic section, six-year-old media addict Calvin explains his TV philosophy to Hobbes, his toy tiger/alter ego. Lois, the mother in the family-oriented serial, *Hi and Lois*, struggles to find an alternative to TV babysitting. On another page, the wry cartoon commentary on daily life *Non Sequitur* uses the immobility of a couch potato to draw a parallel with the slow pace of TV golf.

So what makes television such a significant player in this other medium, an older rival, and a visual one at that?

A *Media&Values* retrospective on comics prepared a few years ago by Joy Clough, RSM, has some answers. As she pointed out, comics offer "a cross-section of human psychology and capture significant snatches of American life. Oldtimer or newcomer, the comic strips apparently owe their ongoing appeal to solid psychology. They mirror human life and respond to the human spirit."

Increasingly, in our age, human life is reflected and the human spirit shaped by interaction with television. So it's perhaps inevitable that TV and cartoons mirror each other. This tendency is reflected in recurring storylines in a number of cartoons: in different ways *Doonesbury*, *Calvin and Hobbes*, *Peanuts* and *Cathy*, among others, use television to define relationships and establish their characters' personal philosophy.

> *"I prefer to have life filtered through television. That way you know events have been packaged for your convenience!"*
>
> **Calvin to Hobbes, *Calvin and Hobbes***

Living With Television

Whether they're conscious of it or not, many of today's cartoonists regard interactions centering around television as a staple subject matter. As Greg Howard, creator of *Sally Forth*, a comic strip focusing on the day-to-day life of a working mother, puts it, "TV is such an important part of everyone's lives, it would be hard to write a strip for very long without mentioning it."

"Television viewing habits provide a common key to family interaction," says Brian Walker, co-writer with his brother Greg of the family-oriented strip *Hi and Lois*.

Bil Keane, creator of the 30-year series of child-oriented vignettes, *The Family Circus*, estimates that 10 percent of his features include the use of a television set in some way. "Not only is TV important in most homes, but it's a very useful tool in helping me present children's perspectives about what's going on in the world. My characters Billy and Dolly wouldn't, for example, attend the Barcelona Olympics. But like the rest of us, they could share and react to the experience on television." Keane's

three-year-old, Jeffy, for example, who is dismayed to discover that his agreement to go to bed "after the next commercial," only wins him a brief period of playtime, could speak for us all.

Television is even a fully articulated part of the world of Trixie, a baby too young to speak to the other members of her comic strip family in *Hi and Lois*. Her thoughts about television, often considerably at variance with adult evaluations (Mommy sees TV wrestling as violent; Trixie sees it as "people hugging each other"), appear in "thought balloons" that present her baby's-eye view of her world—including television—to the reader.

TV's usefulness as a player in modern cartoons presents a paradox for comic storylines, because television watching from the outside is a pretty boring activity.

In responding to this challenge, cartoonists using television in their strips become exponents of media literacy principles almost without knowing it. For example, a series of Sally Forth cartoons from a couple of years ago reflects a challenge faced by many well-intentioned parents: how to monitor their children's TV viewing.

Over a period of several days, humorous dialogue between Sally and her eight-year-old daughter Hilary make a case for monitoring children's TV viewing, concerns about sex and violence on television and the advantages of watching television with your children. When Sally falls asleep at the television set in the midst of a recommended evening of parent-child viewing, the humor doesn't detract from the message: monitoring children's TV use isn't always easy, but it can and should be attempted.

As Howard sees it, Hilary and Sally's conflicts over television serve a dual purpose. They portray an interaction recognizable to many parents, and they present an opportunity to spur serious reflection on

THE FAMILY CIRCUS By Bil Keane

"Go wake Mommy and ask if we can watch cartoons. But don't hurry."

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children's TV use. Hilary's pro-TV perspective adds humor and helps to avoid preaching.

As a Minnesotan, Howard is extremely conscious of whether the strip "will play in Peoria." In that sense, he feels that he has the chance to present a different perspective from the family serials often found on Hollywood-originated national television.

"I often look at television and have the sense that writers and producers don't know how people in Missouri or Iowa live. Often, cartoonists have something to say simply because they live an average life."

Geographic, and, in this case, a national perspective, also shapes the work of Lynn Johnston, a Toronto resident whose Patterson family chronicles have included references to the Canadian parliament buildings and a trip to the Canadian capital, Ottawa, and even (in an animated feature) a character with a country French accent.

Johnston believes her perspective on television has been shaped by Canadian mores as well. "I used to come home from school to watch *The Polka Dot Door*, a Canadian children's show. Twenty years later it's still on. It's much slower-paced than *Sesame Street*, but its stories, reading and playing dressup are tremendously appealing to children."

These positive memories stand in contrast to her worries about the violence on "the other 28 channels." So when Michael tells his father in *For Better or For Worse* that "there's nothing on but sex and violence," he's reflecting a common view of television that pertains to both sides of the border as well as to his creator.

If fact, TV has helped to change the teenager's view of the world during the last few decades, according to Greg Evans, whose 13-year-old character *LuAnn* represents teenage angst in the '90s. "When I grew up, kids were playing, now they're watching TV too much; I don't think that's healthy. Teenagers are a glum lot, anyway; everything they experience seems earth shattering.

"Today's teens might be just as immature, but they already know a lot about the seamier side of life from watching TV. It gives them a window on the world, but that window often pictures things they may not be ready to handle."

Although LuAnn argues with her friends over video choices and postpones her homework to watch her favorite shows, Evans says her activities include much less television than most teenagers probably watch in real life. "If it were really proportional, one out of every four jokes would be about television."

Like Howard and Johnston, Robb Armstrong, the creator of *Jumpstart*, a cartoon about a young African-American married couple, also feels a responsibility to represent his slice of reality. "Sometimes I feel the black community is getting misled by what they see on television. I wonder about what television does to a kid's ambi-

MARCY, BEING A COP IS NOTHING LIKE I EXPECTED IT TO BE...
I KINDA THOUGHT IT WOULD BE MORE EXCITING. LIKE ON TELEVISION..
JOE.. TV COPS SPEND MOST OF THEIR TIME GETTING SHOT AT!
I KNOW! NOBODY'S EVER EVEN TAKEN A SWING AT ME!
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tion and drive to excel. To the best of my ability, I feel like I have to be a voice of reason who says, 'Hey, I'm black, too. Listen to what I have to say.'"

Joe, the husband in *Jumpstart*, is a cop who "still thinks police work should be like it is on television. He thinks TV cops have a lot of fun chasing people in cars, being in shootouts, where nothing bad ever happens to you." Joe's older partner Crunchy, on the other hand, thinks that waiting is "the best part of the job because it means that nothing bad is happening to you at the moment."

Comic Comment

Armstrong feels that television is much more important in the lives of his characters Marcy and Joe than it is in his own life. "I have to be somewhat careful about what they say and think about TV, because I don't want to paint TV as some kind of an evil influence. So when Marcy and Joe watch TV, I use their reactions to express ideas about general principles, like the concept of spending too much time on it. Or I may comment on how silly TV can be."

Now a fulltime art director for The Weightman Group, a Philadelphia advertising agency, Armstrong is aware, however, of the irony of television's major impact on his own life. "I was fascinated by the show *Bewitched*, where Samantha's husband, Darren Stevens, was an advertising art director. I thought it was the coolest job a person could have. So I understand how TV can affect the things you live for."

Which might explain why Armstrong made an exception to his usual avoidance of specific TV scenarios when he decided to draw a series of strips centering on reactions to the hot early '90s sitcom *Seinfeld*. In *Jumpstart's* series, Marcy is ostracized from her clique at work because not only does she not view the show regularly, she's never even seen it. The pressure becomes so great she has to watch it just to fit in.

"It wasn't my intention to criticize Jerry Seinfeld or his show," Armstrong says, "but I did want to comment on the way TV can become this kind of a habit. I picked that example because the show has become kind of a cult, watched by an intelligentsia that doesn't ordinarily watch television."

Television's impact on the average lives of ordinary families is also the common territory of the creators of *Hi and Lois* and *The Family Circus*, a visually-oriented, somewhat sentimental strip that focuses on "the tug at the heart" that occurs when readers re-encounter children's unique viewpoints and perspectives.

Keane, who began drawing *The Family Circus* when his own children were small in 1960, now mines the antics of his grandchildren for ideas. Although long a gentle critic of television—he originated a 20-year look at the TV world called *Channel Chuckles* that was syndicated nationally until 1974—Keane is concerned about the pervasiveness of television in modern children's lives.

"Today's children get to know TV characters better than they know Mother Goose. At the same time, shows that are slanted down for television often don't go over with the young audience." As Keane sees it, producers of Saturday morning cartoons and other shows often lean heavily on violent action because they have so little else to offer. "Children are very discerning, and they don't like being fooled. That's why they often latch on to adult programming, even if they don't understand all of it."

Keane's experience with replays of '50s and '60s television in *Channel Chuckles* showed him how thoroughly TV personalities become integrated in people's lives. The humor in the TV-page feature, which he quit because of demands placed on his time by *The Family Circus*, depended on the instant recognition of such traits as news commentator's Edward R. Murrow's chain smoking or comedienne Phyllis Diller's wardrobe. The feature's popularity and long life bears testimony to viewers' familiarity with and fondness for the whimsies and foibles of their living room guests.

"We want her to believe that the world is a good place... (at least until she starts watching TV.)"

Dad, speaking of baby daughter April in *For Better or For Worse*

Universal Appeal

Many cartoonists point out the pioneering role 100 years of cartooning played in shaping the continuing serials and situation-rooted jokes that go over big on TV sitcoms. Most modern cartoonists share another trait with today's television producers: they're also aiming at the broadest possible audience.

Not that universal appeal is easy in these days of the fragmented media consumer. Notes *Hi and Lois'* Brian Walker, the son of the originator of the classic military-themed cartoon series *Beetle Bailey*, "If you're trying to reach the 100 to 200 million newspaper readers who see comics daily, the most obvious thing they share is eating and food." After that, Walker says, comes television. "In the last few decades, television may not be as universal as eating and sleeping, but it's up there."

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Although television watching is a common experience, that's no longer true of most shows, Walker warns. "Everyone will know Johnny Carson, but not necessarily a child actor on a particular sitcom."

The basically positive family relationships in *Hi and Lois* depend on close observation, Walker says. In the days of working mothers and family mobility, much of that centers around changing roles. "This kind of cartoon is a social subject, but not really a direct social commentary. Nevertheless, it's essential to be aware that jokes about Mom's cooking aren't funny in an era when many mothers are preparing dinner after rushing home from work at 6 p.m. We joke about Dad's cooking, instead. Or maybe about television."

What *are* still funny and relevant to most families, Walker believes, are storylines that focus on family roles, sharing and fights over precedence—many of which now center around television. For this reason, one common TV-related subject has become the various gender-related dis-

NOT ME
NOT ME
HUH?
I JUST WANT TO SEE SOMETHING TOSS ME THE CLICKER!
HERE, I'LL HAND HIM THE CLICKER.
OH NO YOU'RE NOT GETTING YOUR HANDS ON THE CLICKER, EITHER.
WHAT'S THE SCORE?
WHO CARES?
WELCOME TO CLICKERBOWL XXII

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putes relating to family use of the television remote control.

Male Dominance

Another cartoon baby, April in *For Better or For Worse*, expressed it very well without words. In a series of graphic panels, she's shown sitting on her father's lap as he click, click, clicks away changing channels. With a "Yah!" and a "Clunk!" the baby grabs the TV remote and tosses it off his lap. After a surprised pause, her father responds to the ad hoc criticism by saying, "OK...Let's watch this."

"This turns up because it's such a typical family interaction," cartoonist Johnston says. In fact, recent studies of TV use indicate that there must be a lot of women and children out there who would like to respond the same way to male dominance of remote control use. This tension is reflected in a number of recent cartoon scenarios. Variations on the theme have appeared in *Hi and Lois*, *Drabble*, *Cathy* and others.

Such slices of life draw cogent pictures of life-with-television, but they don't always explain it. Reticent cartoonists such as Bill Watterson of *Calvin and Hobbes*, Garry Trudeau of *Doonesbury* and *avant-garde* cartoonist Matt Groening, creator of *The Simpsons* and *Life in Hell*, expound various media philosophies in their strips, but seldom give interviews. An equally verbal, but more available, media-aware cartoonist, Bill Griffith, creator of *Zippy the Pinhead*, is willing to provide both content and context.

Out of This World

Unlike many other comic strip TV vignettes, Zippy's relationship with television takes place outside the realm of family life. Although a living room is often pictured, in a sense the strip's media conflicts take place inside writer/artist Bill Griffith's head. Most strips represent a draw in the continuing struggle between Zippy the Pinhead—a conehead with a five o'clock shadow and a clown suit—and the acerbic Griffy, Griffith's needle-nosed, analytical alter ego.

Griffith (who originated the query "Are we having fun yet?" which appeared on the cover of a 1977 comic book) freely admits that both characters represent parts of himself, although he identifies more with Griffy as he struggles to provide an antidote to Zippy's blissed-out, mediated state. Between them, the interaction represents a kind of *avant garde* media lesson.

People so take the TV world for granted that they usually aren't aware of its absurdity until it's pointed out, Griffith says. "That's why Zippy is a good vehicle. He's such an innocent in the whole scheme of things, while Griff is critical, analytical and media conscious; between them they create a kind of Jekyll and Hyde character."

Although mediagenic in its own way—"because of the way it jumps around from day to day I've had the strip compared to a remote control device"—Griffith sees the strip as an antidote to what he calls TV's "passive acceptance mode. TV's goal is to isolate individuals so we all have to buy one of everything. They want us each to buy a car, instead of one car for six people." The essence of TV is in the commercials, Griffith says. "TV without commercials is something else."

Still Having Fun?

In a sense, Griffith, who says he's uninterested in the broadbased appeal sought by most cartoonists, has refined and concentrated his media criticism beyond the scope of his comic page compatriots. But like them, he depends on the pervasiveness of television in everyone's lives.

As a second-generation cartoonist with a special interest in cartoon history, Brian Walker of *Hi and Lois* has kept tabs on decades of serials. He notes that television appeared in cartoons almost as soon as it became a fixture in the living room. "In strips of the '40s and '50s, TV was still seen as something of a novelty, a household gadget, but it still appeared regularly in comics like *Nancy*. And it wasn't long before it became as much a part of home as the refrigerator."

In several *Hi and Lois* episodes, the children find a unique alternative to passive TV viewing: making up, producing and acting in their own television shows, to the vast enjoyment of Mom and Dad.

The moral seems clear. We can't live without television, but we certainly can do a better job of living with it. And, not incidentally, that oldtime printed visual pioneer, the cartoon strip, can point the way to some useful lessons.

As Zippy might say, "Is TV fun yet?"

Rosalind Silver is the editor of Media&Values.

ZIPPY
" SIT-DOWN COMEDY "
BILL GRIFFITH
WHY IS IT THAT MOST CURRENT SIT-COMS ARE SO CRUEL? WHY IS ALL HUMOR THESE DAYS INSULT HUMOR?
HA, HA!! AL & PEG BUNDY ARE SELLING THEIR KIDS INTO WHITE SLAVERY AGAIN!
ARE WE AS A SOCIETY SO ALIENATED, SO POLARIZED? SO SELF-OBSESSED & MEAN-SPIRITED?
I MISS MARY TYLER MOORE'S FRIGHTENING SMILE...
WHEN TELEVISION REPLACES HUMAN INTERACTION, TH' WEB OF CULTURE IS BROKEN & WE ALL BECOME ISOLATED CONSUMPTO-UNITS...
I UNDERSTAND THAT IN LOW-TECH SOCIETIES, ENTIRE VILLAGES SHARE ONE GAME-BOY!!

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SOCIETY'S STORYTELLER:
How Television Creates the Myths by Which We Live

By George Gerbner

This article originally appeared in Media&Values *No. 17, Fall 1981.*

Storytelling is the great process that makes us recognizably human. A story is an attempt to make the invisible visible — it has to do with relationships, with intellectual connections. We have to have some device to make them visible, dramatic, revealing and embodied in human beings whose characteristics we know and whose actions we can understand. We live our lives in terms of the stories we tell.

What are these stories? How do we weave them into the very complicated, uniquely human structure called culture?

Basically there are three kinds of stories:

There are stories essentially about *how things work*. Stories that make the inner dynamics of life visible are typically called fiction and drama, sometimes mythology. There is no other way to tell the truth about how things work except to construct the facts of the case so as to lead to the natural development of the underlying message and significance of how things really work.

Into that context will fit the second kind of story—a story about *what things are*. It is a kind of factual story: the legend of yesterday or the news of today. It has no meaning by itself. It only has meaning when we fit it into an immensely complex structure about the meaning of it all.

A third kind of story is a *story of action*. It's really a story of value and choice, the prerequisites for action. If this is how things work and this is what things are, we then contemplate a complex of choices, and do something. A story like this presents a desirable goal within a lifestyle. It can be an instruction or a sermon, but mostly it is a commercial—a story of value and choice with which we are surrounded all the time. We happen to live in a culture which offers many, many things to obtain, presumably desirable goals. This is what you ought to do, ought to buy, ought to vote for, ought to consider.

The three kinds of stories have always been woven together in many intricate combinations in a seamless fabric of culture, in different ways at different times. Humankind has woven together the stories that we tell, as we humanize our children and ourselves, in three different ways: the Pre-Print Era (30-50,000 years long), the Print Era (300 years long) and now the Age of Telecommunications.

ILLUSTRATION BY DANIEL WONG

Basically the age of telecommunications is the age of television. And television is the central cultural instrument, the historical predecessor of which is not print or even radio, but pre-print religion. Television is that ritual myth builder—totally involving, compelling, and institutionalizing as the mainstream of the socializing process.

Television as Myth

As in pre-print cultures, television (or storytelling) provides five functions for society.

First of all, television is *ritual*. It is very different from print and film because it is less selectively used. Most people don't watch television by the program, but by the clock. In the average home, the television is on more than seven hours per day. It has its own rhythm, often governing the rhythm of the home.

Secondly, television is highly *institutionalized*. There are basically only a few major sources of television program production. A group of about 100 people in Hollywood produce more than 95 percent of all the programs and essentially determine what most Americans will see.

Furthermore, television is an institution that is in the business of assembling people and selling them to advertisers at a price. There's an overall concept of programming (storytelling)—whether it is news, drama, talk shows, audience participation, daytime serials, whatever—predicated on the formula of "cost per thousand." The basic formula that determines any programming is "how cheap can we provide this without offending too many of the people who will tune in anyway?"

Television is also *total* in its grasp of an otherwise heterogeneous mass audience. Only about seven per cent of children's viewing time goes into "children's programming," so most children watch what adults watch. Of course there is very little regional, ethnic, religious or other separate programming. So there is a totality of

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audience and a uniformity of programming concept and program structure.

Needless to say, television is *entertaining* (compelling) because it is predicated upon giving some kind of apparent reward all the time. We can argue about the quality of the reward; we cannot argue that no one is driven to watch television, yet people watch it a great deal. Why? Because it brings, I believe, some sense of instant satisfaction. It is the first instrument of humankind to bring the millions of people who have always been "out of it" into the mainstream of cultural life. It has brought the famous, the powerful, the beautiful into the lowliest homes.

"The fact is incontrovertible: People today live 'by the media' whereas once they lived 'by the book'."

William Kuhns, *The Electronic Gospel*

People watch television because no one is going to take it away from them—and they will watch it until and unless something more attractive can be provided in their everyday lives. Television is a great bond among otherwise very heterogeneous and diversified groups.

Finally, television is the overall *socializing* process superimposed on all the other processes. By the time children can speak (let alone go to school and perhaps learn to read), they will have absorbed thousands of hours of living in a highly compelling world. They see everything represented: all the social types, situations, art and science. Our children learn—and we ourselves learn and maintain—certain assumptions about life that bear the impact and the imprint of this most early and continued daily ritual. In our age, it is television mythology we grow up in and grow up with.

Our studies for over 14 years show that television basically keeps those who are already in the mainstream *more embedded in it* by helping them hold its tenets more rigidly. Then, television brings members of those groups that have less, or more, than television offers into the mainstream, too.

What is the mainstream like? Let me pick out some of the more salient features on the basis of some 4,000 programs and 15,000 characters that we have analyzed.

First of all, TV is a world in which men outnumber women at least three to one. This male cast makes the world revolve mostly around questions of power. That is why television is so violent: the best, quickest demonstration of power is a show-down that resolves the issue of who can get away with what against whom. On television, there is an incident of violence on the average of five times an hour.

It is also a world in which a few professions (doctors, lawyers, entertainers, law enforcers and lawbreakers) far outnumber all other working people put together. It is a mean and dangerous world, and we find that those who watch more television are more insecure and apprehensive. They demand more protection. They are more likely to even approve of, if not welcome, repression, if it comes in the name of security. This is a dangerous syndrome we call the "mean world syndrome." It is potentially highly volatile, both politically and morally.

A Closer Look

There seems to be no doubt that television's appeal is based on its intimate connection with viewers' needs and aspirations. Although we may improve its content, we certainly will not break that link, and we definitely will not abolish television altogether. At best, we can only teach people how to use it.

"Those who tell stories hold the power in society. Today television tells most of the stories to most of the people, most of the time."

George Gerbner

Our sense of powerlessness about television is devastating and mystifying. To accept it is to accept disenfranchisement. Television is a hidden curriculum for all people, financed by a hidden taxation without representation, paid by everyone regardless of whether they use the service or not. You pay when you wash, not when you watch. Every time you buy a bar of soap a fraction of that price is a tax levy for TV advertising. The total tax amounts to between $55-65 per household a year depending upon the market in which you live.

What then should be the terms of our engagement? That there is an engagement is clear. It has to do with very basic conceptions of life and the dynamics of our society. The more explicit we can make the engagement, the more we can help resolve it.

Bringing these terms of engagement to consciousness is the number one task of education today, which is no longer in the business of dispensing knowledge. (Pupils today learn most of their information from television before the teacher can teach it, and they bring it with them to school. If the teachers are not up on it, they lose any authority that may be left to them.)

It is very important, I believe, for traditional religions to address explicitly and specifically the issue of television as a cultural mechanism. Taking a position, or some combination of positions, already is an important step toward being in control of our own world, of our own perspective. Whether or not your awareness activity is formal media literacy training (pulling out the hidden message from even a dull program, and discussing it), any steps toward critical interaction with the television you see represent huge steps forward.

Above all, turning off the set is not liberation, but an illusion. You can turn the set off, but you still live in a world in which vast numbers of people keep watching. If you don't get it through the "box," you get it through them. As TV personality Jack Paar used to say, "I'm not a religious man, but I believe in Walter Cronkite."

So, for very logical reasons of enlightened self-interest, churches are forced, whether they like it or not, to assume leadership — both for survival and for a new role in a changed cultural situation. Schools — and other institutions of society that have a stake in the great storytelling process — will inevitably have to follow.

This article was edited by Shirley Koritnik, SCL, from a talk given to the World Association for Christian Communication by George Gerbner, professor of communication and Dean Emeritus of the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania.

But What Do I Say?

FIVE IMPORTANT IDEAS TO TEACH YOUR KIDS ABOUT TV

By Jay F. Davis

This article originally appeared in "Children and Television," Media&Values No. 52-53, Fall/Winter 1991.

You've probably heard that, as a modern-day parent, you should be watching TV with your kids and discussing what they see and hear. A recent statement from the American Academy of Pediatrics, for example, states, "Parents should watch television with their children in order to help interpret what they see." In fact, just about everyone who gives advice about children and TV these days is saying, "Discuss television with your children!"

If you're like me, however, this kind of advice only causes you to breathe in through clenched teeth.

Not that I disagree. I mean, it's a good idea to talk about all kinds of things with your children. Things like sex, drugs, schoolwork, curse words, discipline, elbows on the table, dating, rock music. But at least with most of these topics, I kind of know what to say. With television, I'm stumped. Even when I have the time and energy to watch TV with them, I don't know what to look for. And what should I say when I see something that disturbs me?

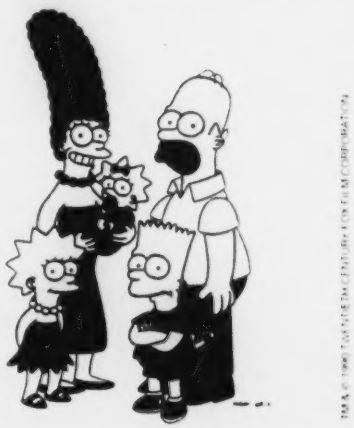
I don't need any more authorized spokespersons telling me I ought to do it. What I need are some specific suggestions, some examples, some simple ideas that will help me really finally do it — and do it without sounding like an unreasonable or out-of-touch parent.

So I want to suggest some ways to put some method in our madness about television. The method I suggest is based on *five basic principles of media literacy*. These principles, I think, can help perplexed parents base their criticisms of TV on something besides their own likes and dislikes.

For example, instead of saying, "I don't like that show because it's too violent," or "Can't you watch something educational?," the following five concepts can help you introduce some reasoned discourse into your everyday discussion of television. I think you'll find, as I have, that your children — and you — will quickly become savvy TV viewers.

#1. *You're Smarter than Your TV.*

Let's face it, if we weren't smarter than our TVs — or at least different from the people in them — our lives would be dominated by gunfights, drug deals and quickly resolved livingroom fights. Fortunately, we don't do everything or believe everything we see



With a little imagination, popular shows such as The Simpsons *can become a tool for untangling commercials.*

on TV, and neither do our children. Yes, there are probably ways in which TV affects us that we're not aware of, but in the end we still make our own decisions.

What this means is that you and I determine (or at least influence) how television affects us and what we get from it. For example, as incongruous as it sounds, you could talk about homelessness while watching *The Cosby Show*. Consider the offchance that a scruffy-looking woman enters the Huxtable's living room: "She looks like that homeless woman we saw downtown yesterday," you say.

"Yeah," says your five-year-old, "except that lady we saw would never come into the Huxtable's house — she was too dirty."

"You think Cosby gives money to the homeless?" you ask.

"I don't know," says the five year-old.

"We could write him and ask," you say.

How on earth did you end up talking about *the homeless* while watching *The Cosby Show*? You connected something from your everyday life to something you saw on television.

Making connections with things in everyday life is probably the easiest way to alter or enhance the messages of television without interfering with your children's favorite shows. It's based on the concept that each of us have "filters" that affect our reception of messages. The idea, then, is to develop similar "filters" in our children that cause them to think of other things — "real life" things — when they see a McDonald's commercial or Bugs Bunny or "bedroom kissing" on TV. This can be especially effective when you begin pointing out interactions on television that parallel ideas from your children's reading or from books you've read to them.

TV can be a way of expanding our world — so that our children want to do *more* reading, play *more* games, even do more creative school work. You can help make this happen by connecting events from everyday experience — no matter how off-the-wall — to the stories your children see on television. With a little experience, your children will learn that they can determine whether TV inspires them or bores them — that they really *are* smarter than the TV.

#2. *TV's World Is Not Real.*

This point is so obvious it seems foolish. All the same, when we watch the news or a presidential debate or a documentary or a nature show, it's natural to assume that what we see and hear is real and true.

especially when these shows are compared with sitcoms and musicals. But in all honesty, I don't reserve this assumption for just newslike shows. For example, do you remember that laundry detergent commercial where the man in the laundromat is making a mess of "separating his colors?" The outcome is so predictable: An attractive woman finally comes over to rescue the man, and they end up with a date.

When I went to college, I remember going to the laundromat prepared to pretend I didn't know how to "separate my colors" in the hope that I'd meet a blonde bombshell who would "rescue" me. I really did this. It took me several laundromat trips to realize that this scenario was somebody's fantasy.

Children, particularly girls and boys under seven, are especially vulnerable to the illusion that the events portrayed on television — like my detergent commercial — are real. According to developmental theory, it's not until about second grade that children develop the intellectual ability to tell the difference between what's real and what's imaginary. So the parents of young children need to be particularly aware of the "unreal" nature of television.

Learning about common sitcom techniques like laughtracks can help kids better understand popular television shows such as Roseanne.

For example, maybe one Saturday morning you're fixing breakfast while your six-year-old daughter watches cartoons. A Barbie commercial comes on. It's clever. Even you are enthralled for a moment. Then suddenly you exclaim "Aw, that's not real, they're trying to make you think that all that sand and ocean and sun come with Barbie. Did you fall for it?"

"No," your daughter hesitates, with a quizzical look on her face. Then her face clears as she remembers that all the things Barbie does are really "just pretend."

Or, pull out strange pieces of knowledge that you've collected over the years about how TV is made: "That's probably white glue in that bowl and not milk. They use glue on TV because it keeps the cereal from getting soggy."

Or: "Have you noticed that the music always seems less happy (minor key) whenever the bad guy comes on?."

Or: "How come Theo (*The Cosby Show*) seldom studies? Do you think he has as much homework as you?"

But use these comments sparingly. No one likes to have their fun turned into a lesson. I find it works well to intersperse several comments in one show, then leave the subject alone for several shows or days afterwards. Your goal should be to make your children skeptical of what they see on TV so that they start to question on their own. Remember, television is never equal to real life.

Making connections with things in everyday life is probably the easiest way to alter or enhance the messages of television without interfering with your children's favorite shows.

#3. *TV Teaches Us that Some People Are More Important than Others.*

I talk to my TV. I suppose some people would say this is definite proof that I've finally gone off the deep end, but I like to look at it another way: I need to keep reminding myself not only that TV is not real, but that TV subtly tells me that some people are more important than others.

So I tell the phosphorescent image of Ted Koppel: "If you interviewed Alice Walker (the African-American and feminist author of *The Color Purple*) about the causes of war...or poverty...or the budget deficit...you'd get a different story."

But it's not just that certain people's—like Alice Walker's—opinions are under-represented on TV. When African-Americans, women, Latinos, Asians or Native Americans—in fact, non-male, non-white groups in general—are seen on TV, they are usually crooks or kidnappers or secretaries or hatchet "men." On the whole, TV presents a generally male and white perspective on the world—everyone else is less important and much more likely to get killed.

Talking back to your TV is probably one of the best strategies for reminding yourself and your children of this questionable—but painfully accurate—picture of reality. When you see something that you think is biased in whatever direction, add your own two cents, especially if your kids are around.

My dad used to do it. Whenever he was watching news clips about the war in Vietnam, he'd angrily interject his opinions on top of the reporter's commentary. This running dialogue is one of the primary things I remember about television as a child. I learned from Dad that if I want my children to know my values and beliefs, they need to hear them above what they hear on TV.

But don't just talk back when you're watching the news. If the portrayal of women is one of your issues, and you're watching a commercial for women's clothing, you might say: "Only models really look like that. Do you know anybody who looks like her?"

#4. *TV Keeps Doing the Same Things Over and Over Again.*

One of the great things about television is that it keeps finding new material, new ways to do old things, new ways to do new things, new topics and new people and new places and new this and new that and even

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Whoopi Goldberg and Demi Moore share an emotional moment from the hit feature film Ghost *— but not the romantic scene that preceded it.*

new news. In fact, there's a lot of variety on television. So what do I mean when I say that television keeps doing the same things over and over again?

Well, I mean that it keeps using laugh-tracks. And scary music. And romantic music. And candlelight. And close-ups. And chase scenes. And the women always wear makeup, even in bed. And the men look muscular. And news anchors always look at the camera. And they seldom say a wrong word.

It's not the shows that are the same, it's the techniques, the conventions, the way they go about making the shows. Say you're watching *Roseanne* with your 10-year-old son, and you've decided that tonight you're going to count laugh-tracks.

"Okay," you say to him as *Roseanne* starts, "I'm going to count laugh-tracks."

"What? Why?" asks your puzzled son.

"Oh, I've been reading this article about how TV shows are put together and it suggested counting how many times the audience laughs."

"Why?"

"Because I'm trying to learn about the way TV does things over and over."

If your son doesn't volunteer to help right away, my bet is that if you miss one laugh track, he'll say "you missed one." Then you're off and running. You can count all kinds of things, you can even get more tricky and try to figure out, for example, if there's a way that models touch things in commercials. Women in magazine advertisements tend to touch objects daintily, whereas men grab them lustily. Does this happen in TV commercials also? And what is this teaching us about female and male roles?

One of my favorite activities is to give attention to the music used in TV shows. Before a show, you might say to your child, "I'm going to analyze the music in this show tonight, would you like to help?" I simply note with a pencil what happens in the show each time the music changes. After doing this two or three times, you and your children will begin to notice patterns in how music is used.

Looking for these common television techniques is one of the more interesting and revealing ways to demystify TV for your children. With a little effort, you can schedule a trip to a local TV station where you and your children (or their class or Scout troop or church group) can ask all kinds of questions about how television is made. You might even be able to sit in on production of the local evening news. As a result your children will find it much harder to watch TV like couch potatoes. It's hard to watch in the same way when you start noticing makeup on sleeping women.

Not only is television always trying to grab the largest audience it can, more importantly, it's trying to grab the largest audience with the highest possible disposable income.

Quality Programming for Children...

- Allows children to be not merely onlookers, but important participants or actors, if not main characters, and to play an active role (in the program).
- Is designed to promote the intellect, emotions and creativity of children in a systematic fashion that helps them make strides in their personal development.
- Respects the intelligence and critical judgment of children and their ability to reflect by avoiding oversimplification, stereotypes, propoganda and intellectual laziness.
- Tries to meet the needs and expectations of different child age groups and uses pertinent studies to do so.
- Provides a world view by paying special attention to reality and yet still inspires the imagination and opens up worlds of family, friends, school, street, city society, earth and universe.

—Excerpted from the Quality Statement of the Children's Broadcast Institute, Canada. From "Children and Television," Media&Values *No. 52-53, Fall/Winter 1991.*

#5. *Somebody's Always Trying to Make Money With the TV.*

The last principle is perhaps the most important. It also impacts my family most directly. I'd like to be able to control the Ninja Turtle/Strawberry Shortcake mania that infects my children and their friends. The question is: What part does television play in eliciting this craze?

The place to begin is with the understanding that just about everything we see on TV is affected by the bottom line. Not only is television always trying to grab the largest audience it can, but more impor-

tantly, it's trying to grab the largest audience with the highest possible *disposable income*. In a real sense, nothing else matters. Most everything we see on TV is concocted to attract those with money and to make those who don't have it, want it.

Make this fact obvious to your children. You can begin by looking at the commercials in the different kinds of shows you're viewing. Say you're watching a basketball game and a Nike Air Jordan commercial comes on. You might say to your kids, "I like this commercial. How come we never see it when we're watching *The Simpsons*?" They'll probably say, "I don't know." But if you're lucky, one of them will say "Because most of the people who watch *The Simpsons* don't necessarily use Nike Air Jordans," and you'll be off and running (and jumping). At any rate, once you've explained it once or twice, they'll begin to catch on.

Make sure your children understand that it doesn't really matter if they like a show — not unless millions of other viewers like it too.

You can also try predicting the types of commercials that you expect to see on certain shows. On a sitcom about single mothers, for example, you might expect products that would appeal to women: personal hygiene products, underwear, household items. An action-adventure show, on the other hand, might feature beer commercials, razor blades or automobiles. After you make your predictions, notice how accurate you are and talk about the reasons why you were correct or incorrect. This is a great activity for younger children, because it helps them identify when commercials start and end, a basic skill for young viewers.

Also, don't forget to point out that both networks and television stations make their money by selling commercials. This means that every show they put on the air has to attract viewers for them to be profitable.

And, if you ever notice a brand-name product in a movie, don't miss your chance to say "I wonder how much they paid to have Burt Reynolds use Tide in that scene?" "Product placement," as they call it, is a very lucrative business in Hollywood these days. It's a hidden form of advertising. Unless you know this you might assume the scriptwriter or set dresser picked these brands as appropriate for the character.

You may even notice that a potentially controversial scene was axed or avoided in a TV show or movie. For example, the movie *Ghost* features a scene where Whoopi Goldberg's body is possessed by a white man's ghost. He then dances (in Whoopi Goldberg's body) with his former (white) girlfriend, but rather than show the two women dancing, the movie shows the man and his girlfriend dancing. To my seven-year-old, I might say "Don't you think it would have made more sense for the two women to dance there? Why do you suppose they didn't do it that way?" The answer, of course, has a lot to do with money. My guess is that the producers were afraid of dealing too directly with lesbian and racial issues. They didn't want to scare away potential patrons by making the movie "too controversial."

Now is the Time!

It's important for your children to understand that just about everything we see on TV is impacted by someone's desire to make money. Assume that there are no pure motives. Even the news is influenced by commercial constraints, with a stiff competition for ratings at the top of the list. The acquisition of networks and television stations by worldwide conglomerates with

Just Say 'No' To Garfield

By Loretta Graziano

Stores have always put up Valentine's Day promotions as soon as the Christmas promotions come down. But now, it's the Garfield valentines that come out as soon as the Garfield Christmas items are put away, and Muppet valentines that replace Muppet Christmas gear. In case you miraculously escaped a Christmas tainted with Big Bird Stockings, Care Bear tree ornaments, and Smurf jammies, you can't relax yet, because your children will be bombarded with those same smiling faces on Valentine's Day goodies as they were for Thanksgiving, Halloween, and back-to-school.

It doesn't stop at holidays either. Licensed tie-ins of TV and movie characters are emblazoned on everything a child needs. It starts with Cabbage Patch diapers, and moves through clothing, lunch boxes, sheets and even food. I couldn't even find a plain old "pin the tail on the donkey" for my daughter's birthday party; all the stores carried were "pin the tail on Garfield" and "pin the beak on Big Bird."

My daughter started asking for Care Bears at age two, and she let me know that any bear would not do. When I saw the price difference between the Care Bear and the generic bear, and projected it over her remaining life expectancy, I decided a strategy was in order. We would "just say no" to licensed characters. She would have to take the generics or nothing.

I've worked hard to make this strategy palatable. She can have the paper cups or sneakers with cute furry characters on them as long as they're not licensed characters. We think of our own names for our generic dolls and stuffed animals so they don't have to suffer anonymity for their lack of commercial sponsorship.

Now when my daughter chooses a birthday card for Grandma she knows she'll have to actually look at the cards; she can't get away with scanning for the first familiar character. She's started to have some idea of tradeoffs: that if we spend less money on X we can spend more on Y — or even spend fewer hours at work. I don't mean to suggest the job is done, because it isn't. She'd still rather buy the pumpkins and Easter eggs that come already decorated at the store, and she's thrilled when I occasionally let her pick an advertised brand of cookies. But I know that I am saving more than just money. I'm saving her ability to think.

Loretta Graziano Breuning is an economics professor at California State University, Hayward, a Strategies for Media Literacy board member and mother.

—From "Media and Money," Media&Values No. 47, Summer 1989. Reprinted by permission of Strategies for Media Literacy, © 1989. All rights reserved.

their own complex profit-making agendas has made the situation more problematic.

Although most of these five basic concepts can be assimilated in some form by any child old enough to turn a television dial, many adults never grasp them. All the more reason to start early teaching the concepts of media literacy to your children. Before long, they'll be spotting new examples before you do. When you find your kids using these principles to analyze the programs you watch — and it may not be long — then you'll know that they've learned the five principles of media literacy. And maybe you'll have a fighting chance at persuading them that they don't need the latest heavily advertised jeans, athletic shoes or Nintendo game cartridge.

J. Francis Davis is a media literacy consultant in Atlanta, Georgia.

Re:Action

Can TV Characters Pay Their Bills?

By Diana DeVries

Bombarded by media images of glamorous jobs with big rewards and little or no effort, young people may conclude work is always exciting, and extravagant lifestyles are easy to achieve. Group or family discussion of the following questions can help both young people and adults focus on the contrast between reality and the work world of television.

- **Discuss what favorite characters do for a living, how much time they spend working and how their work or labor is portrayed. What do their annual salaries appear to be? Could real people earning such salaries afford the lifestyle portrayed?**
- **Listen for dialogue concerning actual prices or costs of goods. What is mentioned? Is it realistic?**
- **Look closely for ways in which currency is actually exchanged. How do television characters acquire possessions? Do they leave tips in restaurants? Do they jump out of cabs, or stop and pay the driver?**
- **Do TV characters ever get the blues from routine tasks? How much of their work is delegated to them/supervised by others?**

—Diana DeVries is a former Media&Values *editorial intern. From "Media and Money,"* Media&Values *No. 47, Summer 1989.*

Learning From Television: Commercials Influence Kids

This article is based on the fall 1990 study, TV Beer Commercials and Children: Exposure, Attention, Beliefs, and Expectations About Drinking As An Adult, *which was co-authored by Larry Wallack, Joel Grube and Diana Cassady and funded by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.*

Young people growing up in America draw on many sources of information in making decisions about important life issues. Decisions about whether and how to use alcoholic beverages are influenced by family, friends, school, church—and television. For too many teenagers, these decisions have significant, sometimes fatal consequences.

Many younger teenagers report heavier drinking. A survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control found that a quarter of eighth graders and more than one-third of tenth graders reported drinking five or more drinks during the past two weeks. In the same survey, approximately 30 percent of eighth graders and almost one-half of tenth graders said they had ridden during the past month with a driver who had just used alcohol or other drugs.

Television is a constant companion in the lives of these children, who watch approximately 22 hours of television per week. Extensive research makes it clear that they learn significantly from what they watch. Young people use television to learn about aspects of life that they have yet to experience—including both intended and unintended instruction about alcohol contained in televised wine and beer commercials.

To answer the question, "*What* are they learning?," researchers at the School of Public Health, University of California at Berkeley surveyed a scientific sample of 468 randomly selected fifth and sixth graders, most of them 11 and 12 years old. Each child was interviewed in person at his or her home.

Researchers found a number of significant correlations among children's exposure and attention to advertising and their beliefs about beer. Among them:

- Children's ability to recognize commercials and recall the brands advertised is significantly related to their level of exposure through weekend viewing and sports programming.
- Their ability to name brands of beers and match slogans with correct brand names relates to their exposure and attention to beer commercials.
- Children who pay the most attention to commercials are least likely to be skeptical about them. They are also most likely to think that beer drinking is cool and macho.
- A striking 88 percent of interviewed children could identify the frolicsome commercial canine Spuds MacKenzie and correctly link him with Bud Light.

The key finding—that the children who pay the most attention to beer commercials have the highest expectation that they will drink as adults—has inescapable implications for policy makers worried about the effects of beer advertising on children.

Regardless of the intent of alcohol advertisers, it's obvious that children have wide exposure to beer commercials and are affected by them. Rather than professional health education it is Spuds MacKenzie and his friends who are educating America's youth about America's number one drug.

Before he left office, former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop called for strict limits on the alcohol advertising messages reaching children and youth.

Consumer groups, youth workers and public health professionals are beginning to work together to focus public attention on advertising's role as a risk factor for teen alcohol problems.

However, higher visibility for this issue on the public agenda is needed. Consumers should let beer companies—and their local media—know that young people are not an acceptable audience for their messages.

The fight to let beer companies know that we're serious about protecting our children is an uphill struggle. This research about the effects of beer advertising on young people provides an essential first step.

—From "Fatal Attraction," Media&Values #54-55, *Spring/Summer 1991.*

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BALANCING BIAS IN THE NEWS:
Critical Questions Can Help Viewers

By Patricia Hynds

This article originally appeared in "News for the '90s," Media&Values No. 50, Spring 1990.

When I read the daily newspaper or watch the evening news, what is missing often upsets me as much as what is there. What is missing frequently seems to be the truth.

Of course, as the Chinese proverb frequently quoted by the late Latin American journalist, Penny Lernoux, says, "There is your truth, there is my truth and there is 'the truth.'"

Most of us are convinced that "my truth" is "the truth." But as we move into the '90s, more and more sophisticated news management techniques will be used to convince us that someone else's "truth" should be ours. After living in Latin America most of the past nine years, I am convinced that there is a great deal of untruth, some of it deliberate, in what is presented in U.S. media about the rest of the world and even about domestic issues. However, with a little practice, you can learn to recognize the subjective underpinnings of a story.

One important point to remember is that objective reporting is a myth. Every reporter brings to the story his/her own biases and world view. Each reporter has to make choices in writing the story: what to include, what to leave out, what sources to use. A few well-placed adjectives, a few uses of "alleged" or "so-called" can wind up a definite ideological twist.

Two reporters can see the same event very differently. I experienced this in a dramatic way when the pope visited Nicaragua in 1983. While many U.S. reporters, especially those arriving and departing with the pope, saw crowds "jeering and heckling" the pontiff, others saw a very different reality—poor Nicaraguans concerned at the continuing loss of their loved ones in the contra war and frustrated at what they felt was the Holy Father's refusal to respond to their pain.

> *"Journalists are supposed to gather, weigh, organize and evaluate information—not just put on pictures."*
>
> **Bill Moyers**

The struggle to appear balanced can obscure "the truth," and it often rests on shaky assumptions. One is the principle that if two perspectives are totally opposed, the truth must lie somewhere in the middle. Another principle stresses that the media must never appear one-sided. Thus much violence in Third World countries and elsewhere is presented as innocent civilians caught in the crossfire between two equally repugnant forces—even in the face of clear evidence of greater levels of abuse by one side.

Another version of the distorted idea of balance requires that every quote that contradicts previous norms, assumptions—or U.S. policies—must be countered by a quote from the administration or a "Western diplomat" or "high official source." This appearance of balance usually leaves the reader hopelessly lost.

The effort to appear objective frequently results in just the opposite, a weighted coverage favoring the current political "party line," or at least not challenging the conventional perspective. Even in domestic coverage, reliance on official sources and the distorting effect of prejudices and fears can lead to the kind of injustice that occurred in late 1989 when William Bennett, an African-American, was arrested for a murder apparently committed by the white Charles Stuart. Stuart used fears about minority crime to avoid suspicion for the murder of his wife. The Boston's media's dependence on police sources and automatic assumptions about racial tensions helped create a false picture.

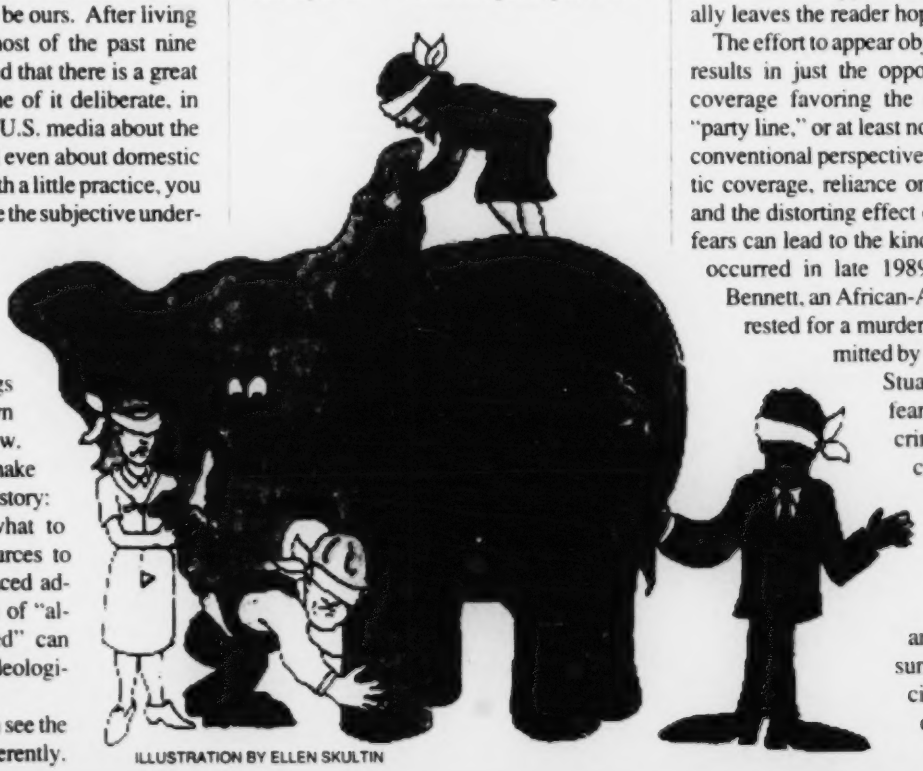

ILLUSTRATION BY ELLEN SKULTIN

Re:Action

How to Detect Bias in the News

At one time or other we all complain about "bias in the news." The fact is, despite the journalistic ideal of "objectivity," every news story is influenced by the attitudes and background of its interviewers, writers, photographers and editors.

Not all bias is deliberate. But you can become a more aware news reader or viewer by watching for the following journalistic techniques that allow bias to "creep in" to the news:

1. Bias through selection and omission
An editor can express a bias by choosing to use or not to use a specific news item. Within a given story, some details can be ignored, others included to give readers or viewers a different opinion about the events reported. If, during a speech, a few people boo, the reaction can be described as "remarks greeted by jeers" or they can be ignored as a "handful of dissidents."

Bias through omission is difficult to detect. Only by comparing news reports from a wide variety of outlets can the form of bias be observed.

2. Bias through placement
Readers of papers judge first page stories to be more significant than those buried in the back. Television and radio newscasts run the most important stories first and leave the less significant for later. Where a story is placed, therefore, influences what a reader or viewer thinks about its importance.

3. Bias by headline
Many people read only the headlines of a news item. Most people scan nearly all the headlines in a newspaper. Headlines are the most-read part of a paper. They can summarize as well as present carefully hidden bias and prejudices. They can convey excitement where little exists. They can express approval or condemnation.

4. Bias by photos, captions and camera angles
Some pictures flatter a person, others make the person look unpleasant. A paper can choose photos to influence opinion about, for example, a candidate for election. On television, the choice of which visual images to display is extremely important. The captions newspapers run below photos are also potential sources of bias.

5. Bias through use of names and titles
News media often use labels and titles to describe people, places, and events. A person can be called an "ex-con" or be referred to as someone who "served time twenty years ago for a minor offense." Whether a person is described as a "terrorist" or a "freedom fighter" is a clear indication of editorial bias.

6. Bias through statistics and crowd counts
To make a disaster seem more spectacular (and therefore worthy of reading), numbers can be inflated. "A hundred injured in air crash" can be the same as "only minor injuries in air crash," reflecting the opinion of the person doing the counting.

7. Bias by source control
To detect bias, always consider where the news item "comes from." Is the information supplied by a reporter, an eyewitness, police or fire officials, executives, or elected or appointed government officials? Each may have a particular bias that is introduced into the story. Companies and public relations directors supply news outlets with puff pieces through news releases, photos or videos. Often news outlets depend on pseudo-events (demonstrations, sit-ins, ribbon cuttings, speeches and ceremonies) that take place mainly to gain news coverage.

8. Word choice and tone
Showing the same kind of bias that appears in headlines, the use of positive or negative words, or words with a particular connotation, can strongly influence the reader or viewer.

Originally reprinted with permission from Newskit: A Consumer's Guide to News Media, *The Learning Seed Company, 21250 N. Andover Rd., Kilder, IL 60047.*

—From "Ethnic Diversity," Media&Values *No. 43, Spring, 1988.*

Many factors impede the transmission of accurate information, including changes taking place in the media itself, from more and more outlets owned by fewer and fewer corporations/conglomerates to TV coverage that focuses on the 30-second sound bite instead of description or analysis. In newspaper coverage, superficial, but very popular, treatments such as the headline format developed by *USA Today*, work against critical analysis that could challenge official propaganda.

Also, reporters increase their access to sources when they write material that meets source approval, and lose it when they challenge the assumptions of those sources.

Less and less often do major networks or newspapers, let alone local media, station correspondents overseas. So when an international story breaks, reporters fly in with no background on the issue, often without speaking the language or understanding anything of the area's history or culture. The result is a too-easy reliance on "official" resources.

The missing voices of activists and grass roots sources are a cause for great concern even when establishment bias is unintentional. But reporters' dependence on authorities makes them—and by extension media consumers—particularly vulnerable to deliberate attempts to mislead by governments and agencies. A case in point was the Office of Public Diplomacy, set up in the State Department during the Reagan administration to drum up support for the contras. Supervised by Oliver North, press releases were created that deliberately put out false information. In point of fact, reporters should consider the axes being ground by any government offices of information, but all too often their accounts are taken at face value.

Reading Between the Lines
Judging the accuracy of what we read, see or hear in the media is not easy. However, it is possible to ask critical questions, to help determine whether or not we are getting the whole story.

1. Who are the sources and what are their perspectives? How many are U.S. officials? How many are "unnamed?" How many are critics of U.S. policy? Be suspicious of accounts that come only from high officials and of any reports released during a military emergency. (Journalists were banned from Grenada until the U.S. inva-

sion was over, and press pool reporters were reviewed by the military during the invasion of Panama.) But more subtle influences occur all the time—for example, are foreign "person on the street" interviews only with those who are well-educated or who speak English well?

5. Are exaggerated or rhetorical claims reported uncritically without journalistic scrutiny? Loaded adjectives or phrases like "terrorist," "left-wing," "freedom fighters" (or President Ronald Reagan's "evil empire" remarks) should alert us to shorthand rhetoric that conveys an ideological point of view. One of the most overused and misused words in political coverage is "democracy." Democratic-style government can be organized in a variety of ways; the U.S. model is only one. We can be suspicious when the press repeats phrases over and over as if they held the same meaning for everyone.

"American volunteer workers affiliated with various churches are a neutral force in South and Central America today. They have a more compelling story to tell than does Washington."

L. S. Clemens

2. Are significant questions left unasked or unanswered? Is the political, social, economic or historical context missing? This is especially important in the early coverage of a breaking event. In the aftermath, many questions will be raised and criticisms made, but what will be remembered is what we first saw or heard. To the U.S. public, the event is an issue only as long as it is a headline or lead story. The fleeting appearances and disappearances of African famine from the news are one example. When coverage occurs, usually around a crisis situation, it seldom examines underlying social and political causes. If they are mentioned, the U.S. role in them is rarely questioned.

3. Do quotes seem abridged or out of context? *The New York Times* quoted U.S. church worker Jennifer Casolo, upon her release by the Salvadoran military, saying, "I don't think I suffered." According to *Newsday*, she said, "I don't think I have suffered as terribly as the thousands of Salvadorans have suffered here." Quite a difference.

4. Does coverage seem to offer a partial or selective history of events? References to returning Panama to "democracy" and to Eric Del Valle as the "last elected president of Panama" are a case in point. In actuality, Del Valle was both instituted and removed from office by General Manuel Noriega. The last elected president of Panama was Nicolas Ardito Barletta. He was elected in May 1985 in elections—defended by the U.S.—that were so fraudulent that he was referred to as "El Fraudito."

6. What stories or events are not covered? For example, during the media's recent focus on Eastern Europe, Brazil's presidential elections passed virtually unnoticed, even though there are more Brazilians than Poles, Hungarians and Czechs put together. Many parts of the world are covered by U.S. media only if American troops are there, if the U.S. has major economic interests or if the administration is waging a propaganda offensive. It is a sad journalistic truism that many Third World countries only make the news if there are "coups or earthquakes."

No one can form an opinion from stories that are never covered. That's why alternative sources of news are so important. But the critical reader can learn to read between the lines of brief and biased accounts. Asking the right questions about what we see and hear is the first step toward making the informed political choices on which the freedom we value so highly depends.

Pat Hynds is a Maryknoll Lay Missioner and currently the director of Latinamerica Press in Lima, Peru. She worked at the Jesuit-directed Central American Historical Institute in Nicaragua for six years.

The Birth of the "Sound Bite"

"One of the most dramatic changes in television reporting has to do with the way statements by the president and other top administration officials are handled.

Until the early '70s, it was common for the White House correspondent simply to introduce a presidential statement with a brief summary and then to show the president's remarks unedited, often for two minutes or more.

Today TV reporters routinely cut an official's remarks into 10- or 15-second sound bites, then weave these into their own narration. It is the journalist, not the official, who speaks to the news audience."

—Dan Hallin
We Keep America on Top of the World

How to Know What's Going On

Although it is important to develop a critically questioning eye and ear, moving beyond mainstream media to a wide variety of alternative sources of information is an even better way to be better informed about both domestic and world events.

Newsletters from religious and humanitarian organizations such as Church World Service or Amnesty International are a good place to start, as are public radio news shows such as those on National Public Radio or the Pacifica radio stations.

Magazines and alternative newspapers can also provide additional perspectives. Spend an hour at a newsstand or bookstore (or check the periodical room of your local library) and look through such periodicals as the *National Catholic Reporter, Tikkun, The Nation, In These Times, South, The Economist, New Perspectives Quarterly.*

Compare notes with friends or perhaps share the cost of a subscription. Or each one subscribe to a different journal and exchange. The bottom line is to read, watch and listen critically to a wide range of points of view.

—From "News for the '90s," Media&Values *No. 50, Spring 1990.*

ALICE DOESN'T LIVE HERE ANYMORE: BUT THE WHITE RABBIT DOES

A Glimpse Behind the Looking Glass World of TV's Nonfiction Programming

By Elayne Rapping

ILLUSTRATION BY TODD JOHNSON

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This article originally appeared in "Tuning In to Television," Media&Values No. 40-41, Summer/Fall 1987.

July 4, 1986 was more than just Independence Day, a time for picnics, fireworks, and waving Old Glory from the front porch. In celebration of the renovation of the Statue of Liberty, an entire weekend — Liberty Weekend — was set aside for TV merrymaking. The holiday actually swelled into a full week of publicity, anticipation and previews of events, most of them televised, with David Wolper, a producer of TV specials, overseeing the proceedings.

In the midst of the hoopla, this media event even generated its own reviews. "Is it News or Entertainment?," the headlines asked. The question was valid. The ABC extravaganza—an official ritual of the most powerful government in the world—was not unlike a Las Vegas floorshow. At home on a soundstage covered with brightly lit stars, Elizabeth Taylor introduced Frank Sinatra's rendition of his 1942 classic, *The House I Live In*. As the Hoboken-cum-Beverly Hills crooner paid tribute to the denizens of a small town America he had never inhabited, and which resembled daytime soap opera's Pine Valley more than any real American city, the camera picked up the beaming faces of "Nancy and Ron," old friends from the days when Hollywood and Washington were a continent apart.

"TV's texture matches that of our daily experiences. If we can understand it better, then perhaps we will better understand the world we live in and the actions we must take in order to live there."

Horace Newcomb

Glitzy as all this seemed, it was not a departure from TV convention. In fact, since the inception of home TV in the post-World-War II 1950s, the medium has worked to blur and blend the distinction between news and entertainment, between fantasy and reality. Because we think of TV as a cultural form, it is fiction that is primarily analyzed as drama, while news—the province of sociologists—is discussed as information. Other non-fiction genres—the game shows, variety acts and talk shows that make up so much of the TV schedule—remain virtually unanalyzed, even though they also epitomize the masterful re-creation of reality that characterizes the TV world.

In spite of these separations, when we watch an hour of television, our experiences are remarkably similar. We see a series of images—a flow—all of which partake of similar settings, characters and messages, and are presented in the same slick style. News itself is ever more dramatic and emotional in form and style, while dramatic programming more and more resembles the commercials, and even the newsbreaks, which interrupt it constantly.

A Seamless Whole

"I'm not a doctor, but I play one on TV," says a personable young man plugging aspirin. In a moment, the drama resumes—a miniseries, perhaps, in which a fictional character played by Robert Mitchum discusses international affairs with a "real" Winston Churchill, apparently changing the course of World War II. When a newsbreak appears, announcing the latest medical breakthrough or military catastrophe, it is difficult indeed to know how to respond.

It is here that the power of the media is most awesome. It creates an entire universe—a looking glass world—which is, for too many of us, more emotionally fulfilling and intellectually coherent than our actual personal and social experience. This world, like Alice's own looking glass land, is apparently identical to our own, yet subtly deceiving. What comes to us as we sit—often for up to seven hours a day—before the little lighted box, seeking escape or remedy for our troubles, trying to fathom the ways of the world and the human heart—is a picture of the world that we recognize as our own, yet experience as somehow more manageable and reassuring. Reality has been shaped into a drama of its own.

The least apparent, but perhaps most potent, aspect of this phenomenon is its cohesiveness. We can see the drama and "read" the message of, say, a *60 Minutes* segment, easily. But to see that the very same worldview and ideology is played out on game shows, on *People's Court*, even on *Real People*, is less evident, but nonetheless true. When Vanna White flips her letters, the tension, the thrills, the disappointments acted out by players and shared by audiences are as much a theatrical presentation of the American Dream as Liberty Weekend.

While watching we learn a new dogma: that in a world of poverty, scarcity and dreams that come true "once in a lifetime," material commodities are the most gratifying things life is likely to offer most of us, the most certain signs of success and luck. These lessons jibe with the teachings of the TV credo. Like its fictional counterparts, nonfiction TV uses show biz and dramatic convention to sell messages that echo those of the commercials and the news itself.

"The low arts are still capable of creating new forms because they are still in touch with life."

Alan Gowans,
The Unchanging Arts

Like the dramas it mimics, TV nonfiction has a penchant for easy answers, simple narrative and pat solutions. Take the "TV justice" meted out in the *People's Court*, for example. In 15-minute stories filled with issues and passions, Judge Wapner metes out justice to folks just like us, with interpersonal problems the system rarely finds ways to handle, or rarely even acknowledges.

In a world in which major institutions largely ignore the ordinary person, TV meets this need. But it ignores the limited application of its solutions, just as the news on the other channel highlights medical miracles only accessible to those lucky enough to afford them.

The New News

When local news became a profit center and market research analysts sat down to find out "what people wanted," they discovered something odd. Human interest—not information—was what they craved. The logical result, the fictionalization of news, can now be glimpsed on every local channel, as chatty anchors share gossip and trivia and stations slip slivers of information into the weather/

sports/movie review pastiche.

In fact, news directors are remarkably successful in returning audiences to that warm small town, the one Sinatra sings about, with every newscast. Local news teams—young, bright, attractive and charming—are not really journalists at all. They are performers paid to impersonate the friends and neighbors we all wish we had but all too often lack in our increasingly segmented and impersonal worlds.

Although local news purports to be nonfiction, its reassuring but highly distorted tours of our cities' back alleys and public buildings are actually far from our real experiences of life. Set in the same world as the soap operas, these marketing wizard-created Emerald Cities with their "have schmaltz, will travel" anchors seek to plumb the tragic need for a sense of moral and social cohesion that lies at the heart of modern American life.

On a larger scale, these unmet needs go far to explain our president Ronald Reagan's success in creating an unwarranted sense of belonging and security for his nationwide audience. Reagan didn't invent this strategy, but he was hired as the current lead. He came along — a seasoned pro — when the nation had been long-schooled by the TV screen to accept his brand of leadership. The groundwork for this video statesmanship was actually laid in the Eisenhower administration, when government awoke to the possibilities of a medium that could present history-in-the-making that was as seductive as a beauty pageant, a ball game and a Shakespearean drama rolled into one.

That's what we've had ever since. And the socialization of the TV world we enter every day has thrown its glamorous spell like a net into the workaday world. Long ago, we stopped trying to make TV like reality, and started trying to make reality like television.

"Dallas, *or* Dynasty *or reruns of* I Love Lucy *satisfy a larger proportion of the population than* Hamlet *or* Hedda Gabler *can ever hope to approach.*"

Gary Gumpert, *Talking Tombstones*

The best solution, perhaps, is to understand the unity that informs the television vision, wherever we flip the channel. We've all traveled a long way into the looking glass world. But to borrow a metaphor from another fairy tale (and a media movie and TV classic), the Wizard of Oz's hokum magic was exposed when Dorothy looked behind the screen to see him working the levers. We too need to look behind the screen at the ordinary people pulling the strings.

Elayne Rapping is professor of communication at Adelphi University and is the author of The Looking Glass World of Nonfiction TV *and a TV movie of the week,* Private Stories/Public Events.

Freeing Ourselves From Our Devil's Bargain with Advertising

By Kalle Lasn and Cat Simril

In the privacy of our living rooms we've made a devil's bargain with the advertising industry: Give us an endless flow of free programs and we'll let you spend 12 minutes of every hour promoting consumption.

For a long time it seemed to work. The ads grated on our nerves and over the years they expanded into a whopping 20 percent of our TV time, but even so it seemed a small price to pay for TV programming.

Now we're beginning to learn what all that "free" entertainment has cost us. The answers are in the daily papers and the nightly news: a warming planet, a punctured ozone layer, vanishing forests, recurring oil spills, daily species extinctions and acid rain destroying our lakes and rivers.

Almost every evening we see news items on environmental disasters followed by cheery spots for luxury goods. It's time we learned that these two sides to television aren't separate. Indeed, they create each other.

Sooner or later, each of us will have to face a private moment of reckoning and ask the unaskable: "Am I living in harmony with my environment? Do I fit into nature? Does my community, my city, my country?"

For North Americans, the answer is almost surely no. We are only five percent of the world's population, but we consume one-third of its resources and produce about half the non-organic waste. With this record in mind, it's getting harder and harder to deny our consumption-fueled responsibility.

Now in hindsight—facing the third millennium on an increasingly damaged planet—it's becoming clear that somewhere along the way we sold our souls.

What we didn't realize when we made our pact with the advertisers was that their agenda would eventually become the heart and soul of television. We have allowed the most powerful communications tool ever invented to become the command center of a consumer society, defining our lives and culture the way family, community and spiritual values once did.

"We're beginning to learn what all that 'free' entertainment has cost us."

ADBUSTERS Quarterly

How can we renegotiate the bargain and get our souls back when most of us can't conceive of a a world without consumption, a world whose economy isn't fueled by the endless hunger for material goods?

We can let our televisions keep on chanting their consumption mantras and pretend there's nothing wrong with our way of life, or we can start taking control of what we see. Breaking the bonds of the consumption ethic leaves us free to imagine the world we want. Only then can we move toward it.

Kalle Lasn and Cat Simril are co-editors of ADBUSTERS Quarterly *published by The Media Foundation, a Vancouver-based society dedicated to redefining the way the media are used in North America.*

—From "Media and the Earth," Media&Values *No. 51, Summer 1990.*

HOME, HOME ON THE REMOTE:

Does Fascination With TV Technology Create Male-Dominated Family Entertainment?

ILLUSTRATION BY JORGE MOLINA

This article originally appeared in "Men, Myth and Media." Media&Values *No. 48, Fall 1989.*

On a recent segment of a popular television news magazine program, the television anchors joked about a new cultural phenomenon: men's almost anatomical affinity for television remote-control devices. The segment ended when the female member of the team noted that in view of men's tendencies not only to control situations but also to maintain some distance from their activities, their liking for zapping the channel flicker from afar made perfect sense.

Referring to the new world of communications media as "a masculine domain," Germany's Jan-Uwe Rogge and Klaus Jensen are one of several research teams around the world beginning to examine how family members interact with each other in the presence of sophisticated home entertainment media:

> *"Dad keeps both of the automatic controls — one on each side of his chair."*
>
> **World Families Watch Television**

remote-control-driven televisions, VCRs, video games, stereo systems and even computers. The findings are providing significant new insight into the influence of today's mass media on relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children, male and female siblings.

Indeed, some families seem to be experiencing a thorough "rearrangement" of the moral economy of the household, particularly in regard to traditional child-rearing practices, family communication rituals and, especially, power relationships

between the spouses.

These cultural trends are being watched and documented by researchers such as David Morley and his colleagues Roger Silverstone and Eric Hirsch at the Centre for Research into Innovation, Culture and Technology at Brunel University near London. Although still a new area of investigation, their initial studies, along with those from six other countries, make fascinating reading in *World Families Watch Television*, edited by James Lull of San Jose State University. The following vignettes reveal some of the more interesting findings from the book and related research.

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"We discuss what we all want to watch, and the biggest wins. That's me, I'm the biggest."

Masculine power is evident in a number of the families as the ultimate determinant on occasions of conflict over viewing choices. It is even more apparent in the case of those families that have a remote-control device. None of the women in any of the families use the remote regularly, and a number of them complain that their husbands use the device obsessively, channel-flicking across programs even when the wives are trying to watch something else.

Characteristically, the remote-control device is the symbolic possession of the father (or the son, in the father's absence) that sits "on the arm of Daddy's chair" and is used almost exclusively by him. It is a highly visible symbol of condensed power relations, the descendant of the medieval mace, perhaps?

Interestingly, the main exceptions to this overall pattern are those families in which the husband is unemployed while his wife is working. In these cases it is slightly more common for the man to be expected to let other family members watch what they want to when it is broadcast while he videotapes what he would like to see in order to watch later at night or the following day. His timetable of commitments is more flexible than those of the working members of the family.

Thus, the man's position of power is based not simply on the biological fact of being male but rather on a social definition of masculinity of which employment (that is, a "breadwinner") is a necessary and constituent part. When the condition is not met, the pattern of power relations within the home changes noticeably.

It is noteworthy that a number of the men interviewed show some anxiety to demonstrate that they are 'the boss' of the household, and their very anxiety around this issue perhaps betokens a sense that their domestic power is ultimately a fragile and somewhat insecure thing, rather than a fixed and secure possession which they can always guarantee to hold with confidence. Hence perhaps the symbolic importance to them of physical possession of the channel-control device.

A man accustomed to this dominance feels he has the power to change channels whenever he wants—even in the midst of his wife's favorite show or events the children are watching. "The television's flickering all the time while he's flickering the timer," noted one wife.

Interestingly, male dominance of viewing choices is almost entirely absent in Venezuela, where researcher Leoncio Barrios found that the traditional matrilineal Venezuelan family structure reversed the pattern found elsewhere. Thus, in Venezuelan families it is often the grandmother of the household who walks around with the remote tucked in her apron, to the distress of her grandchildren.

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"I knit because I think I am wasting my time just watching. I know what's going on, so I only have to glance up. I always knit when I watch."

One major finding is the consistency with which both men and women describe their viewing activitiy. Essentially, men state a clear preference for viewing attentively, in silence, without interruption "in order not to miss anything."

Moreover, they display puzzlement at the way their wives and daughters watch television. For the women, viewing is fundamentally a social activity, involving ongoing conversation and usually the performance of at least one other domestic activity (ironing, etc.) at the same time. Indeed, many women feel that to just watch television without doing anything else would be an indefensible waste of time, given their sense of domestic obligations. The women note that their husbands are always "on them" to shut up, and the men can't really understand how their wives can follow the programs if they are doing something else.

A number of women explain that their greatest pleasure is to be able to watch a "nice weepie" or their favorite soap opera when the rest of the family isn't there. Only then do they feel free enough of their domestic responsibilities to "indulge" themselves in the same kind of attentive viewing in which their husbands routinely engage.

Wife: "Flick, flick, flick— when they're in the middle of a sentence on the telly. He's always flicking it over."

Husband: "The remote control? Oh, yes, I use it all the time."

World Families Watch Television

What is at issue here is the guilt that these women feel about their own pleasures. They are, on the whole, prepared to concede that the dramas and soap operas they like are "silly" or inconsequential, yet they accept the masculine worldview that defines their preferences as having low status. Having accepted these terms, they then find it hard to argue for their preferences because, by definition, what their husbands want to watch is more prestigious.

They then deal with this by watching their programs, when possible, on their own or only with their women friends and fit their viewing arrangements into the crevices of their domestic timetables.

Lull observes that home is the site of leisure for employed men, a place they can relax when the work day is done. For women, however, home is a site of work; they can never fully relax and enjoy viewing in the same way that men can.

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"I can't use the video. I tried to tape something for him and I done it wrong. He went barmy. I always ask him to do it for me because I can't. I always do it wrong."

Although women routinely operate extremely sophisticated pieces of domestic

technology (such as microwave ovens, washing and sewing machines), British researcher Ann Gray has discovered that many women feel alienated from operating the family's VCR.

"The reasons for this are manifold and have been brought about by positioning within the family, the educational system and the institutionalized sexism which divides appropriate activities and knowledge in terms of gender. But there is also, as I discovered, something I call 'calculated ignorance:' 'If I learnt how to do the video, it would become my job just like everything else,' said one woman."

In a novel experiment reported in *Boxed In: Women and Television*, Gray asked women to "color code" pieces of home technology. "When a new piece of technology is purchased," observes Gray, "it is often already inscribed with gender expectations. By asking the women to imagine pieces of equipment colored either pink or blue, I've been able to throw the gender of domestic technology into high relief."

Within this visual classification, irons become pink and electric drills blue; the washing machine is pink on the outside, but the motor is almost always blue.

Gray noticed, however, that the color coding of the VCR was more complex. "The record, rewind and play modes are usually lilac (a genderless color), but the timer switch is nearly always blue, with women having to depend on their male partners or their children to set the timer for them." And, corroborating Morley, Lull and others, Gray found that "the blueness of the timer is exceeded only by the deep indigo of the remote control switch, which in all cases is held by the man."

Interestingly, the major exception to this by-and-large universally accepted allocation of technological power involves the soap opera. Across cultures, women are fiercely attached to the "telenovella," the "Oshin," the "daily weepie" — so much so that when their viewing of these extended romantic sagas is at stake, they will often rise to the occasion and learn how to operate the VCR.

In one Kentucky family observed by Thomas Lindlof, Milton Schatzer and Daniel Wilkinson at the University of Kentucky, the wife, Patty D., "had the most interest in purchasing the new family VCR so that she could time-shift her favorite soap operas." Then, reversing the traditional role, she "remained in control of almost all the taping events." Nonetheless, the researchers found that in the other families, "most female family members generally disavowed interest in operating the VCR and regarded it as a technical matter," and that even Patty D. was "wary" of the pre-program function "until the exigency of archiving material for her children motivated her to learn to program the machine."

Lull adds another insight: males are usually more involved in making the VCR purchase decision and, as a consequence, are initially more competent in its features and functions when the machine arrives in the household. With more initial expertise, and perhaps having more time to devote to taping and other more advanced applications, the male dominates in using the VCR.

"Fathers were observed, and named by other family members, to be the persons who most often control the selection of television programs in the U.S."

***James Lull*, World Families Watch Television**

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"A husband and wife were talking with the TV set turned on. When he wanted to ignore his wife's claims he started to switch the channels rapidly, commenting about what was shown on each."

"Historically, men's and women's relationship to technology has come out of their relationship to each other," says Karen Altman, professor of communications at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles and an authority in the field of gender and technology.

In an exclusive interview with *Media&Values*, Altman explained that traditionally, men have acquired power through language and information, while women's power has been associated with passive seduction and the guardianship of the home. This demarcation line extends to the advertising images that have become embedded, through the centuries, in the cultural subconscious.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, advertisements for TV sets approached men and women according to these ideological models. "The television was clearly a sign of masculinity when men were associated with it," explains Altman. "In many early TV ads, men are shown watching television with pipes in hand and their trophies on the set, signifying the television as a place of potency and virility.

"When women were pictured with TVs,

Re:Action

Helping Children Challenge Stereotypes

Stereotypes and overgeneralizations characterize the way young children think. In line with that tendency, children learn expected sex roles early — and apply them liberally. They learn sex roles from many sources, but the media are prime teachers.

In order to challenge narrow sex-role images of men, watch TV with kids. Look at magazines together. Identify blatantly stereotypical representations of men. Make a "play" out of those messages, but change something. Make the man in the vignette a woman, or vice versa. The result will probably be humorous to the child, but the humor may open the door to discussion and insight. Why does it seem funny? Why can't a woman say or do those things? Even preschoolers can play this game.

Have older elementary-age children think about their favorite TV show. What if one or two main characters switched gender? Would it be possible considering the way the show is written? In what ways would it seem silly? In what ways would it be fine? What does the switch say about our images of men and of women as well?

Judith Myers-Walls, Ph.D. is Associate Professor and Extension Specialist at Purdue University in Lafayette, Indiana.

—From "Men, Myth and Media," Media&Values *No. 48, Fall 1989.*

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however, the family and home took prominence. The woman was in the background, clearing the table, watching from a distance. Or she was in evening wear, lounging on the television or standing seductively beside it, associating the set with the feminine qualities of passivity, receptivity and consumption. The woman was used in the ad as a display object, like the product itself.

"At the same time, a man would often be portrayed in suit and tie, delivering a testimonial on the quality of the TV. In other words, men controlled language. And the ads ascribed to television the qualities associated with masculinity: control, activity and mastery."

Changing men's and women's relationship to technology will not be easy, says Altman. "Although there's nothing natural about the assumption that men automatically know and care about technical details and women don't, it's reinforced by public messages that we've gotten for years."

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Using TV Specials as Teaching Tools

By Myra Junyk

The *Earth Day Special*'s tale of a dying Mother Earth was seen by millions of young people on April 22, 1990. Obviously, the rudimentary plot, in which Bette Midler personified Mother Earth, was not the draw. The program's attraction lay in several elements: the media buildup to Earth Day events around the world, increasing consciousness of environmental issues and the attraction of watching all those celebrities presenting tips on becoming environmentally responsible.

Media events like this special can provide an excellent base for young people to explore complex questions about how our society handles environmental issues. While no thinking person would deny the importance of the environment, the commercial background that underlies all such programming is still open to analysis.

Young people should not be fooled into thinking that the very companies who contributed to the environmental mess we are in today will become the environmental leaders of the future.

Debriefing this program can help young viewers increase their consumer awareness. They can also be applied to any programming that struggles to blend information with entertainment values:

- Is the program merely factual, or does it blend facts and opinion? If it presents both, how do we separate them?
- Have the complex events portrayed been simplified for a general audience? If so, what important details were left out of the presentation? Why was this done?
- How effective was the program in encouraging changes in environmental behavior? Did you change your behavior as a result of the show?
- Was the associated advertising appropriate? Can you think of any other ways of paying for such a program? Were there any participating advertisers that you were surprised to see?

We don't see specials about Earth Day every day. But every day is not too often to understand the commercialism that underlies even the best-intentioned programming. And Earth Day is a good time to start.

Myra Junyk is Vice Principal at Monsignor Johnson, Toronto, Ontario. From "Media and the Earth," Media&Values *No. 51, Summer 1990.*

Re:Action

How to Enjoy Commercial-Free TV

Most children watch about 20,000 commercials a year, but that doesn't mean they have to continue watching this many. Creative use of the VCR, public television channels, video rental shops and public libraries can help them and you enjoy TV viewing without being sold a bill of goods.

1. Tape now for future viewing. Encourage kids to save their favorite shows to watch later. Taping them and re-airing them — zapping through the commercials — helps children learn to substitute outside play, homework and chores for afternoon cartoons and reruns. As an added bonus, you have a chance to screen their program selections if you wish. The tapes are available for repeated reruns.

2. Create adless tapes. Commercials can be erased from existing tapes, but why see them even once? Small children can learn to use video remotes to stop recording whenever commercials come on, and they're usually excited about practicing the technique. At the same time they learn that commercials are dispensable and disposble.

3. Establish a family video library. With these tools, even young children can learn to "produce" their own favorite program recordings for future use — and incidentally make them commercial-free at the same time. Parent-approved "family library" tapes need no future screening for replays.

4. Explore public television. High-quality programming goes far beyond *Sesame Street*. Check the schedule listings for children's specials, educational programs and cartoons. Nature shows and documentaries often appeal to children or address their special interests. These nearly commercial-free offerings are ripe for taping.

5. Check out the library. Increasingly, public libraries, schools, religious and community institutions stock excellent general and special-interest videos for the borrowing — most of them commercial-free.

6. Avoid program-length commercials. Children clamoring to rent or buy programs featuring the latest cartoon character or action figure can learn to think twice about the intentions behind their favorite shows. Knowing that the programs were created to sell the products — not the reverse — is the first step to commercial awareness.

7. Fight kidvid ads. Unfortunately, some of the same sponsors who brought you cartoons-as-products are invading the children's video market. If at all possible, buy or rent only commercial-free videos.

—From "Children and Television," Media&Values *No. 52-53, Fall/Winter 1991.*

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I'LL BE HOME FOR HANUKKAH

After years of having no heritage, TV characters are beginning to bring their backgrounds on screen.

By Rosalind Silver

This article originally appeared in "Ethnic Diversity," Media&Values No. 43, Spring 1988.

Scene 1:
Hanukkah candles glimmer in the December darkness of a comfortable living room. As mother and baby gaze at them, a thirty-ish, dark-haired man walks into the room. As he enters and sees the menorah, his eyes meet his wife's in a look of love and understanding. As the scene ends, a friend leaves a Christmas tree on the doorstep.

Scene 2:
It is just after nightfall at the bar of a crowded but cozy restaurant. As a tall, dapper black man in a stylish suit finishes a story, a blond white man leans forward. He exchanges looks with a collegiate-looking black man standing next to the bar. "Isn't that just like him?" their glances say.

The scenes described above are snapshots from the popular ABC drama *thirtysomething* and CBS's critically praised, but still-too-little-watched half-hour "dramedy," *Frank's Place*. Although their storylines and ambience are very different, both well-reviewed shows represent a positive trend in network television— an ethnic mix, non-stereotyped characters and a real sense that the characters know and understand each other.

On *thirtysomething*, that understanding is the stuff of real life. The show's creators freely admit that the characters and lives of the young marrieds and singles they feature are based on their own lives and those of people they know.

"Michael does represent our own feelings about our religious beliefs and our ethnic background," according to Richard Kramer, a member of the production team and author of the Christmas/Hanukkah episode. "But beyond that, it's helped us in creating someone who's very real. We know his grandparents, his aunts and cousins; we had seen his Bar Mitzvah. We wanted to create a character who was full."

thirtysomething

Most important, Kramer says, was the desire to avoid doing "the standard television character who is nothing—who is only handsome—and has no ethnic background."

Other current TV series have also dealt with Jewish themes and characters: *A Year in the Life* has its own episode on intermarriage, *LA Law* has dealt with anti-Semitism and *thirtysomething* has delved into religious and cultural practices, including a dream in which Michael's Yiddish-speaking grandfather appeared. The intermarriage theme received the most response: as Kramer puts it, "We were overwhelmed with cards and letters." (Although as some critics have noted, television is still short of shows featuring couples in which both partners are Jewish.)

Although *Frank's Place* is notable for the easy relations between its African-American and white characters—Bubba, a Jewish lawyer and a habitué of the restaurant, is Frank's best friend— its writers like to think they're not just avoiding stereotyping but "expressing truth with a small 't'—a literary truth."

"Shows about blacks usually act as if 'blackness' were a separate country," notes writer Samm-Art Williams, who is one of the show's several black writers and producers. "Being black is a subculture, not something separate; it's part of the general

mixture."

Even a show about Frank's refusal to be the token dark-skinned member in a club for light-skinned blacks "wasn't so much a show about the issue but about anyone who had that kind of decision to make," commented producer/writer Max Tash during a group interview with several writers and producers. "When I watch the show, I don't ask myself whether it expresses black culture, even though many people think it does. I ask myself whether this point got across or whether the joke was funny."

In general, *Frank's Place* writers try to develop their characters and use fewer set formulas for working with them. It helps that "the network leaves us alone," which they attribute to the strong personality of executive producer Hugh Wilson. Wilson's own Southern background helps boost the show's oft-noted sense of place, and he provides many ideas.

Strong writing is the key to balanced ethnic portraits, according to Mark Malis, v. p. casting for Universal and co-chair of the minority and disabled casting committee of the Casting Society of America.

"We've developed guidelines to help casting directors encourage more minority

Frank's Place

and disabled casting so these groups can be portrayed more positively, and I've been very involved in this work. But of course, we get the scripts after they're written; we can't affect what they say."

Malis finds it hard to see how a greater consciousness of white ethnicity in the casting process could help portrayals of white ethnic groups. "What's 'looking Jewish,' for example?" he asks. "Italian or Polish or Irish names appear in the scripts, but they're played by the same actors that play other roles. An actor's physicality does affect casting somewhat but beyond that I'd pick the best actor.

His thought is echoed by Joseph Giordano, director of the American Jewish Committee's Center on Ethnicity, Behavior and Communications, who notes, "Jews and blacks are making progress, but where are the stimulating shows about Hispanics, Greeks, Russians? The rest of us have got to do what it takes to get it together."

Another Look

If consciousness for Jews, at least, is changing, Susan Baerwald at NBC is part of the new awareness. As vice president for development of mini-series and novels for television, she has overseen a number of Jewish-themed projects, as well as many more general big-budget mini-series and dramatizations.

"I don't look for 'Jewish' projects necessarily," she says, "but when we're doing them I relate to them, because that's who I am." She notes that the recent well-received recounting of the Leo Frank case and its tale

Vigilant Parents Help Fill Media's Ethnic Gaps

By Judith Myers-Walls

Modern media provide children with much of their primary information about the world. Their potential impact on youngsters' ethnic images is far-reaching. Models of integration, portraits of ethnic characters and information about history and current issues all have the opportunity to provide children with their first ideas and opinions on our racially mixed society.

Children need adult guidance and supervision in forming balanced portraits, however. Because of their limited experience, they are inclined to latch onto stereotypes as they begin to think about the world. Overgeneralizations often appeal to them. If they are presented with stereotyped images, they will buy into them.

Because of this, children may need help in interpreting some classic children's programs. They need to know that occasional black-face characters in cartoons or cowboys shooting Indians without a second thought don't represent reality. Even a famous Disney movie like *Song of the South* distorts the treatment of blacks on plantations, and shows the white plantation owners treating the Uncle Remus character like an irresponsible child.

Although these programs may not have a strong influence on how children behave on a day-to-day basis, they can have a subtle impact on desensitization to injustice and subconscious attitudes.

Current children's programs, especially Saturday morning cartoons, also create concerns, however, even when they don't appear to have any racially identified characters. Perhaps the most important issue to consider is the tendency to build on stereotypes in general, making these attitudes seem natural. In general, children's programs deal in absolutes, showing characters as either good or bad, smart or stupid, happy or sad. This creates a mindset in children that feeds into racism and sexism.

As usual, the best antidote to these dangers is adult participation. If parents and other concerned adults can screen the media that children experience and watch, and listen or read it with them, they can help counteract stereotypes and provide needed background. Then they can:

- Comment on negative images of any societal group.
- Point out that everyone can be smart, stupid, silly, serious, helpful or in need of help at different times. Everyone is capable of good deeds and everyone makes mistakes.
- Use opportunities created by media to educate children about slavery, immigration and civil rights.
- Give children positive multi-ethnic experiences. Firsthand experience is more powerful than any media stereotypes.

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—*From "Cracking the Color Code,"* Media&Values *No. 38, Winter 1987.*

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of anti-Semitism in pre-World I Georgia, *The Ballad of Mary Phagan* involved close consultation with the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League.

"They formed initially to deal with that case, so it was particularly appropriate," she says. "But there are solid promotional and financial reasons for involving groups in the production process and working with them on promotion for their audiences."

In general, the network's Broadcast Standards and Practices Department has set up guidelines to avoid stereotyping and negative portraits of minorities, Baerwald said. "They can tell us to avoid casting minorities as criminals, and make sure that every doctor isn't a white male." But, she says, positive portrayal and casting that stretches or explodes stereotypes, "like casting a gorgeous hunk of an Hispanic" as a major character on *LA Law*—"that depends on someone like Stephen Bochco."

Telling Details

Ethnic themes do require knowledge, however. "I knew I was in trouble on the set of *Evergreen* (a saga about a Jewish immigrant woman) when a dinner table crowd all raised their glasses and said *'Shalom'* instead of *'L'Chaim.'* The writers didn't know the difference, but we were able to set them straight," Baerwald says.

Such niceties are a very recent concern, according to Lionel Chetwyn, a producer/writer/director whose credits include *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, and *Winter in Clear River*, a recent TV drama about one woman's fight against the Nazis in a small American town.

Although Hollywood has long been heavily Jewish, it's a new thing for Jewish producers, writers and executives to be comfortable with letting their roots show, Chetwyn says. "At the same time, the treatment of minorities moved from Stepin Fetchit to the Huxtables without presenting much of the anguish of the journey. "I think what we're seeing now is a realization that the people who watch television are much more interested in the things that make us different than the people who run things have been."

With all their differences, these shows, and others like them, do demonstrate the many factors that must coalesce into solid, non-stereotyped ethnic portrayals on television. A creative vision, strong leadership and a supportive, yet hands-off attitude from the networks help to make it happen. Excitement about the characters keeps them real, week after week.

But even more important, there has to be a sense that what is being said about them is acceptable, and the definition of acceptability changes. The family life of black professionals, the exploration of Judaism, interracial friendships have become acceptable, or they wouldn't be appearing on television. And the fact that they are on television will help to make them more so. One thing, however, hasn't changed. The highly successful *thirtysomething*, watched by some 25 million people, has a safe harbor for its ethnicity, psychologically-oriented portraits and innovation. The continued existence of the high quality of *Frank's Place* depends on better ratings than the show has garnered so far. Although next season's episodes were ordered when this story was researched, no one among the cast and crew members celebrating the seasonal wrap could help wondering: "Will we still be here next year?" **(Editor's Note:** *Frank's Place* was eventually cancelled.)

Like the famous tree in the forest, "an ethnic mix, non-stereotyped characters and a real sense that the characters know and understand each other" don't really happen—unless enough people are watching.

Rosalind Silver is editor of Media&Values.

Ads Pose Dilemma for Black Women

By Marilyn Kern-Foxworth

For decades, Aunt Jemima, the Quaker Oat's pancake syrup symbol, has been one of the most-recognized trademarks in the world. A hefty figure in her red bandana, she has also represented a stereotypical portrayal of the black woman.

In late 1989, Aunt Jemima turned 100. In an attempt to keep pace with the '90s and beyond, Quaker Oats celebrated her birthday with a facelift. They discarded the bandana, subtracted a few pounds, and gave her a new makeup job. Adorned with a pretty lace collar, a Betty Crocker hairdo and small, feminine pearl earrings, she now looks like the "after" photo in a magazine make over.

Like Quaker Oats, advertisers need to rethink their strategies regarding women of color. Whatever her image, until recently Aunt Jemima stood alone as almost the sole representative of minority women in advertising.

For many years, advertisers shied away from using black models, particularly, in advertisements for cosmetics and health and beauty aids. Ironically, if they had done their homework they might have realized the economic potential of using minority women models in advertising these products. According to the American Health and Beauty Aids Institute, African-American women spend up to five times more on personal care products than the average consumer. In fact, by 1993 black women are expected to buy more than 50 percent of the health and beauty aids used in the U.S.

As advertisers awaken to these projections, women of color—better educated, more self-confident and affluent than ever before—are beginning to feel their purchasing power. As black journalist Karen Grigsby Bates wrote in *Essence* magazine: "I have refrained from sending my hard-earned dollars the way of companies that tell me I don't exist."

Although growing recognition and lessening of stereotypes are welcome, they present women of color with a dilemma. We must remember that we are wanted not for ourselves but for our growing importance in the consumer market. Although we seek full inclusion in society, do we really want to encourage our sisters to buy into the consumer economy promoted by advertising? Maybe Karen Bates is right and as women of color we shouldn't use our green to purchase products until we see more black, brown, yellow and red female faces advertising them.

But even when we do, we must remember that appreciation of our purchasing power is a consequence, not a cause, of fuller acceptance in society.

Dr. Marilyn Kern-Foxworth, APR, is author of the forthcoming Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben and Rastus: Blacks in Advertising Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.

—From "Redesigning Women," Media& Values *No. 49, Winter 1989.*

IT'S A WHOLE NEW BALL GAME:

TV sports is a ritual for millions, but few fans stop to consider how television has changed the game.

By Stuart Showalter

This article originally appeared in "Wide World of Media Sports," Media&Values *No. 36, Summer 1986.*

It's the "dog days" of August. Outside, the heat is high and perspiration is dripping. The kids are off swimming and the lawn needs mowing. But it will have to wait because inside, on the tube is... *football!*

The Kickoff Classic, a made-for-media contest held each August, matches two of the previous season's top-rated college teams in an effort to build excitement for the annual race for football glory. Whatever the outcome of the game, however, the existence of the Kickoff Classic primarily illustrates the symbiotic nature of sports and media, especially television: they need each other.

On the one hand, athletic contests provide television with a nearly perfect program form. Media critic Les Brown notes that sport events are "at once topical and entertaining, performed live and suspensefully without a script, peopled with heroes and villains, full of action and human interest and laced with pageantry and ritual."

On the other hand, television fuels public interest in sports by paying team owners millions of dollars for the rights to broadcast games for the sole purpose of drawing fans to their sets and keeping them there for the duration of the commercials.

For the last three decades at least, sports has increasingly become a media creation, with television as the chief benefactor. But with sports ratings falling in some areas and advertisers taking a second look, the days of continued expansion seem to be over.

If we as media consumers want to participate responsibly in the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat, we need to understand television's impact on sports, and ultimately, on society and on us. Also, we need to realize that we shape the media by our choices.

ILLUSTRATION BY DAMIEN RAMIREZ

Fanatical Fans

Sports have always attracted major corporate sponsors because, as fans, we follow our favorite teams so faithfully. A 1986 poll by *Sports Illustrated* revealed that 84 percent of Americans watch sports on television a least once a week; 71 percent of the respondents considered themselves fans. In a 1982 poll, 81 percent of the men and 67 percent of the women said they would be "angry" if major sports events were unavailable on network television.

We need sports as an outlet because play is an important part of life. As critic Hal Himmelstein writes, "We're desperately seeking relief, with no personal risk, from the monotony of our everyday lives; we want a manufactured emotional high or even an emotional low. Then after the joy or despair wears off, we can return to our own world in which our place is as secure as it was yesterday and the day before."

Our seemingly insatiable demand for more sports over the years, especially more televised sports, lies behind a number of changes in how the media cover sports and, as a consequence, in the sports themselves.

Time tells. Because time has value, especially for electronic media, it provides a telling window onto these changes.

Television makes its own rules. A game which moves too quickly for the camera, such as ice hockey, had a short life on American network television. On the other hand, the world's most popular sport, soccer, gets little American network exposure

because teams score so few goals and there are no "time outs" (and thus no opportunity for commercials) during the 90 minutes of play.

Television interests clearly lie behind the increased number of night games, particularly for major league baseball. Two out of every three baseball games are played in artificial light. Without much regard for crisp October temperatures, baseball now holds most of its playoff and World Series games during prime-time evening hours. A lone holdout team, the Chicago Cubs, will eventually play home games at night — not because of inadequate spectator support, but because night games produce more sought-after TV revenues.

The starting times for athletic contests have also been manipulated to serve the TV fan. Executive producers think nothing of having spectators arrange for brunch or early dinner if a high noon starting time works best for the TV schedule. A noon starting time becomes necessary to fit two games or major events into a single afternoon. In recent years, programmers have discovered that the 11:30 a.m. Eastern time slot can be used for West Coast events to attract a sizable national TV audience.

Once a football or basketball game has begun, its natural ebb and flow are disrupted not only by natural breaks dictated by game rules, but also by the periodic "TV time out." These breaks are called by a clearly identified official whose job is to stop the game on cue from the television director when time is needed to run the game's sponsoring commercials.

More Than a Game

For the viewer, commercial interruptions have come to be an accepted part of the game. Stadium spectators adjust to these unnecessary breaks in the action, as they do to starting times and scheduling designed for the convenience of a national viewing audience.

The media have also altered the rules, playing fields, and the type of uniforms and equipment used by teams and athletes.

The small screen has helped inject more life and color into the games most suited for it. The National Football League changed its rules to encourage greater use of the fan-pleasing forward pass. In baseball, the designated hitter and "lively" ball have put more offense into the game and onto the screen.

Golf changed from match to medal or stroke play in order to guarantee prospective TV sponsors attractive celebrity golfers in the final stages of an event. And tennis introduced the tie-breaker to end long, drawn-out deuce games.

Tennis players also abandoned their traditional "tennis whites" for colorful costumes and yellow balls — because they project better on TV. In hockey, the once solid center line was changed to a broken one so the fans at home could see it.

As advertisers become more selective and consumers choose from a multitude of media options, the vast banquet of the last 20 years may be contracting to a manageable meal.

Longer seasons provide more opportunities to generate the revenues that networks, team owners and sponsors, and professional players seem to demand. The football season, for example, not only seems longer than it was in the 1950s — it really *is* longer.

In exchange for increased fortune and fame, college teams readily agree to play games even before students arrive on campus for fall classes. At the other end of the schedule, bowl-bound athletes find themselves foregoing Christmas vacation for football in January.

Expanded schedules mean that we can no longer mark the year's four seasons by major sports, which now overlap in the extreme. The football season starts soon after baseball's midsummer break. Baseball finally concludes with the World Series in October, after football has reached peak form. Basketball opens in November and stretches into the following June.

But schedule expansion has occurred mainly in major sport's second season, the playoffs, which heightens the drama and unpredictability that attract large audiences. Competition crescendos as top teams strive for supremacy — or survival. Because of the lure of television's dollars, the major college basketball playoff field has grown from 16 teams to 32 to 48 to 64, enticing more fans to become involved in the countdown to the fortunate Final Four and eventual championship.

But the ultimate in expansion is simply the sports program schedule itself. In addition to the blockbuster events, the networks each offer sumptuous fare every weekend in their "wide world" coverage of everything from figure skating competitions in Moscow to surfboarding in Hawaii. Real sports junkies can further feast on round-the-clock offerings from ESPN (an all-sports cable network that fills in the gaps with videotaped events), and supplements supplied by regional syndicators and independent superstations such as Atlanta's WTBS and Chicago's WGN, whose signals are distributed via cable systems.

And Sports Tonight

And then there's the news. As much as 25 percent of a local news half-hour may be devoted to reporting scores and interviewing favorite coaches and players. On weekends, an extended "Sports Final" reviews the week and reruns the big plays.

As advertisers become more selective and consumers choose from a multitude of media options, the vast banquet of the last 20 years may be contracting to a manageable meal.

To extend the analogy a little further, the sports fan coming off a media binge needs

Feeding Hungry Fans

TV created a new appetite for big league sports, and the major leagues — to nearly everyone's satisfaction — were willing and able (in the jet age) to supply a new diet of big league franchises. And besides contributing to the expansion of existing leagues, TV helped create entire leagues out of whole cloth (the AFL, the ABA, etc.) It raised pro football to a par in popularity with baseball. It introduced millions to tennis and golf and turned pro sports into a socially acceptable profession, and a desirable one.

—Don Kowett, *TV Guide*

to consider what kind of sport regimen would constitute a well-balanced diet. Promoters give us what they think they can sell—from slickly hyped boxing matches to narrowcast repeats of local Little League games—but it's up to us to allocate our time and our dollars.

In the meantime, a little reflection on the mores and meaning of media-fied sport wouldn't be out of place. Do television sports, for example, limit our participation as athletes or spectators? Do they enhance or hinder our social relationships? Do they encourage a sense of wholeness in our lives?

It's a cliché that the best seat in the house is often in front of the television set. To take that a step further, ask yourself how many times, as a spectator in the stands, you've caught yourself waiting for the instant replay.

In this way we get what we always want but seldom get in life—a chance to re-experience a peak moment. But this expectation and others the media create fragment an experience that would otherwise be an integrated whole. Only awareness of this process can help us put the pieces back together again.

Stuart W. Showalter, chairs the Communication Department at Goshen College in Goshen, Indiana.

HOW WE CONNECT

By Tyrone Cashman

It takes only one summer for a child of the right age to bond with the natural world, to know in her bones that the world is alive and wild and kin to her. There is a kind of imprinting that either takes place or doesn't in a girl or boy before the age of 10 or 11.

As long as the wilderness survives, there is a place for this bonding to occur. As long as there are unspoiled natural places near enough for us to reach them and spend enough time in them, our children can have that inner awakening and sense of connection.

PHOTO BY ELIZABETH THOMAN

But it can never happen through media. Television's nature programs are wonderful. They must continue. They are probably the most important programming produced in our time. But we humans cannot form that essential bond through the tube.

The majesty, the power, the presence of a world uncreated by humans and uncorrupted by them cannot be reduced to the size of a TV screen, or glossy photographs in beautiful magazines, not even to the wrap-around screen of an Omni theater. Something essential is stripped from nature when it comes as a mediated image instead of a direct encounter.

When, for the first time, a nine-year-old barefoot boy and a wild crawfish encounter each other by surprise in a cold spring creek, there is nothing like it in the world. The boy's life is changed. And if he explores this watery world and the woods that surround it for the length of a long summer, he will have taken the whole ancient biosphere into his soul, never to be forgotten. The imprint is for a lifetime.

But if those imprintable years are allowed to pass for a boy or girl with only vicarious, mediated experience of nature, it is likely that as adults they will never be able to understand why a mountain forest is anything more than a pretty scene for a postcard or potential boardfeet or pulpwood for the commodities market.

Tyrone Cashman is president of the Solar Economy Institute, Mill Valley, CA, and is trained in the philosophy of biology. From "Media and the Earth," Media&Values No. 51, Summer 1990.

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DECODING MTV:
Values, Views and Videos

By Jeff Kellam

ILLUSTRATION BY MERRELL VIRGEN

This article originally appeared in "The Birds, the Bees and Broadcasting," Media&Values No. 46, Spring 1989.

The headline in our local paper read, "Pediatricians Condemn Rock Videos As Bad for Teens."

Welcome to the club, I thought. Many parents, educators, religious leaders and some teenagers themselves had already reached that conclusion. Now, by virtue of a November 1988 story in *American Pediatric News*, the official publication of the American Academy of Pediatricians (AAP), doctors were joining the concerned group.

I wasn't ready to agree on the dangers of video without some personal verification. Are all rock videos "bad" for teens? Or, are some rock videos "bad" for some teens some of the time? And if so, why, and what can be done about it?

Like most parents and youth workers, pediatricians concerned about rock videos focused on both their content and the amount of time kids spend watching them — an average of two hours a day, certainly a significant block of time. Evidently music videos, once a fad, have become a normal part of many young people's routines.

As for the content, the AAP spoke for many parents when they declared that "Music videos may represent a new art form, but we believe that it is one that contains an excess of sexism, violence, substance abuse, suicide and sexual behavior."

Interestingly, sexual behavior was included in this negative list without reference to the way it was portrayed. Clearly, the physicians had a problem with the appearance of sex in music videos at all.

A mother who came to a workshop I gave on media images of sexuality had a different view. "What really concerns me," she noted, "is that we've coined a new word — sexnviolence — and our kids are growing up with the impression that sex and violence always go together. They won't know how to express their sexual feelings without being violent." Although her comment embraced several media, it certainly applied to music videos.

In fact, the AAP report noted that 75 percent of thematic videos contained sexually suggestive material, and 56 percent portrayed acts of violence, often directed toward women. A 1984 study by Sherman and Dominick, reported in the Winter 1986 *Journal of Communication*, called adolescent sex in music television "long on titillation and physical activity, but devoid of emotional involvement," reflecting a common trend in pop music in general.

These researchers had a different view of MTV violence, finding that men were the most frequent aggressors and victims, while "females involved in violence are more likely to be aggressors than victims, perhaps substantiating the observation that the predatory female is a popular music TV stereotype."

"Often, parents aren't spending much time with their kids, who live in a different world. That has a lot more to do with their lives than the lyrics of songs."

Jill Rosenbaum,
co-author of a study of MTV in Orange County, California high schools

Selling Sex

Music videos' status as entertainment and art form tends to obscure their use to sell records. Every music video is essentially a three-to-six-minute commercial for the performer or performance it features. Sexy videos take advantage of the power of sex

as a sales tool.

All the sources of music videos—commercial television stations, local video stores, even video jukeboxes, as well as the full-time, satellite-fed outlets of VH-1 and MTV—make this use of any sex they portray.

With all this in mind, it was clearly time for me to re-evaluate music television. As a video producer I admire the visual creativity of much that I see in videos. As a rock enthusiast and radio producer I enjoy the sound of much that I hear. But as a pastor, youth worker and 44-year-old parent, I share the AAP's concerns about the messages communicated by the lyrics and visual images in some videos.

"Rock stars are role models for kids. So, it's not hard to imagine young viewers saying, 'If Michael Jackson can terrorize his girlfriend, why can't I do it, too?'"

Dr. Thomas Radecki, National Coalition on Television Violence

An evening's viewing, admittedly not a long time, did lead me to some conclusions:

• *Not all videos are created equal.* Some videos chronicle live concerts, others use a studio setting for a performance. The videos that cause the most concern often tell stories based (albeit rather loosely) on song lyrics. Or they may ignore lyrics completely and build visual imagery based on little more than free association and stock footage.

• *Many videos are sexy.* Images from my evening's viewing include women in black stockings and garters, Bobby Brown doing pelvic thrusts as he sings "My Prerogative," Pink Floyd's always-undulating backup singers and the sensuality of the background dancing enhancing the Southwestern setting of Steve Winwood's "Don't You Know What the Night Can Do?"

• *Like rock music itself, videos often simplify and objectify love.* As I watched The Escape Club's stylistic videos (including a pistol that seemed to be used as a percussion instrument) and listened to "Gimme safe sex; gimme love," I couldn't help reflecting that rock musicians seem to demand sexual love so much more than they offer loving relationships.

Between my impressionistic observations and the more solid statistics of the two studies, we can certainly conclude that *some* music videos can create unhealthy perceptions of human sexuality in the minds of *some* teenagers, especially if those teenagers have no positive sexual values and role models with which to balance media images. The difference between "gimme sex" and "let me express my love" is best taught by example.

Jeff Kellam is director of The Video Education Center at the Presbyterian School of Christian Education in Richmond, Virginia. He produced a syndicated radio show on popular music for more than 20 years.

Countering Violence From Slasher Films

By Bill Wolfe

Those who work with young people are increasingly concerned about the sexual lessons taught by sexually violent films. Movies like *Nightmare on Elm Street, The Toolbox Murders, Friday the 13th, Halloween* and their various sequels place sex in a threatening context. In these films, young women are the victims of killers wielding axes, saws, knives, even electric drills. Most often, their slashing climaxes are heightened by sexual situations and erotic scenes.

Easily available to young people through videos (despite "R" ratings), these films constitute primary sexual lessons for youngsters.

The question facing young people is what to do with such vicious violence couched in an erotic context — especially when they are just beginning to learn how to engage in significant social relationships themselves.

Probably the most common approach is to dehumanize the violence, even to laugh about it as one would triumph in laughter over a fear-producing ride at an amusement park. This attempt at desensitization can backfire, both immediately and over a long period of time, as couples lose their awareness of each other as persons.

Another reaction is to view the aggressive behavior as a model for their own, stopping just short of the actual violence. Though as we hear in the news each day, it does not always stop short.

Both of these reactions are harmful, but there is no way to test the extent of that harm, or even to know the number of youth affected.

Church or synagogue youth groups could provide immeasurable help to young members and their peers by focusing on these films and how to respond to them.

Warning: There may be some resistance. Youth may say that these are only harmless little films and adults need not bother, especially if they suspect censorship. Parents may even agree by adding that their kids wouldn't go to this kind of film anyway and should not be exposed to it in a youth group.

Youth leaders, however, know that discussion from a values perspective is desperately needed by young people building their adult value systems. Confronting the conflict between what is shown on the screen and what one feels inside is necessary for healthy growth.

It may be helpful to the discussion to use a few clips of these kinds of films. If parents express uneasiness about showing clips, arrange a meeting for them to view the segments and discuss the problem. The impact of even a few examples should convince parents that it is crucial for their children to deal with this subject in a group concerned about values rather than to experience it alone or with a date.

If no concern is shown by youth leaders about this subject, it could easily be assumed that viewing sexually violent films is only one more example of what it means to be an adult today.

Bill Wolfe is executive director of the Presbyterian Appalachian Broadcasting Council.

—From "The Birds, The Bees and Broadcasting," Media&Values No. 46, Spring 1989.

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SEX AND CONSEQUENCES:
Reflections of a TV Writer

An interview with Dan Wakefield

This article originally appeared in "The Birds, The Bees and Broadcasting," Media&Values No. 46, Spring 1989.

Editor's note: The sexual awakening of James at 15 *was tough on Dan Wakefield, creator of the innovative and critically acclaimed 1977-78 NBC series. It cost him his job. Wakefield quit the show after NBC's Broadcast Standards Department censored the word "responsible"—a euphemism for birth control—used in an episode in which James was to lose his virginity. Ironically, the segment had been ordered by network programmers to lift sagging ratings. Wakefield, now a writer working in New York, is a journalist and novelist as well as a scriptwriter. Two recent books are* The Story of Your Life *and* New York in the Fifties.

In the interview that follows, Media&Values' *Ira Rifkin talked with Wakefield about* James at 15 *and the changes in TV's handling of teen sexuality in the decade since the show was cancelled.*

M&V: *Where does James at 15 fit into the history of TV's treatment of teenagers and sexuality?*

Wakefield: Prior to *James*, teenage life was only portrayed in the non-serious and non-respectful manner of a sitcom, or a comic fantasy like *Happy Days*, which was nice but still a comic fantasy. We tried to do a show that was real. We were trying to deal with teenagers not as funny sitcom characters, but as real people with real problems.

Additionally, our show was from James's point of view. Previously, TV always looked at teenagers from the parents' point of view and the attitude that kids were cute or funny.

M&V: *You ran into problems in the area of sexuality almost immediately, did you not?*

Wakefield: Yes. The pilot for the show had James and his family moving from Oregon to Boston. One of the things I wrote about was a decision by James and his girlfriend to make love for the first time before he left town. They never did get around to it, but there was a scene in which James has a talk with a male friend and asks to borrow "that thing you carry around in your wallet and never use," and the friend says, "You mean old 'Be-prepared?'"

James at 15 *pioneered the realistic treatment of teenage sexuality in the late '70s.*

The NBC censors said we couldn't do that, but the producers shot it anyway and the scene was in the version shown to the reviewers. They singled it out as one of the best things about the pilot. But when the program aired on TV that scene was cut.

M&V: *Do you see any problems with TV's penchant for cute euphemisms when it comes to sex and sexuality?*

Wakefield: Euphemisms can give a message that sex is something bad or at least embarrassing to talk about. But that's what people do in life when discussing a charged subject, so there's nothing wrong with teenagers using euphemisms on a TV show. It's the context in which the words are used and the overall values of the show that determine whether a euphemism is harmful or appropriate.

M&V: *How about the amount of information? Is there a danger of young people learning too much about sex from TV even when the information is stated sensitively and realistically?*

Wakefield: Obviously, there's always the danger that the information can be misused or misunderstood. But I think the overriding danger is ignorance. Also, I think that producers and writers are, by and large, very responsible people who try to put behavior into a context that portrays its consequences. That's the best you can do.

M&V: *What changes have you noticed in the way TV deals with teenagers and sex in the decade since* James at 15?

Wakefield: I've noticed a willingness to be real. Since *James*, many shows have been good, open, natural and responsible in dealing with the issue of sex and teenagers. *Kate & Allie*, *Valerie*, *The Bronx Zoo*, *Cagney & Lacey*, the made-for-TV movie *Daddy* and others have dealt frankly with the problem of teenage sex and unplanned pregnancies.

M&V: *What prompted this change?*

Wakefield: After talking to some of the writers and producers of these shows, it's very clear to me that this has occurred because of what is happening in the world. The taboo about talking about condoms, for example, was broken because of AIDS. AIDS has become such a serious problem that television could no longer avoid talking about them.

M&V: *What about abstinence? Do you think the networks have given that approach a fair hearing?*

Wakefield: In my talks with producers and writers about presenting sexuality responsibly, they always say they never show a teenager having casual sex. Instead, they always portray teenagers talking about whether they are in love and asking whether they should wait until they are committed. But when I asked if anyone had thought of having the young characters discuss waiting until marriage, nobody had thought of that alternative.

M&V: *What does that say to you?*

Wakefield: I think that some portion of the teenage population does ask the question, "Should we wait until marriage?" But it was interesting to me that the mores of society, at least in television terms, have changed so much that these writers and producers thought the question irrelevant if they were to do a realistic show. Television does reflect the mores of the culture, even if it picks up changes later than other kinds of media. So a statement like that actually represents a tremendous cultural shift.

M&V: *Do you have any suggestions for improving TV fare in this area?*

Wakefield: More creative freedom. As I've said, the people who actually work on the shows — the writers, the producers — are extremely responsible and talented people. I think all the complaints about television come from its curious internal system, with so many people telling you what to do.

When we were doing *James* we felt we had to satisfy at least three different sets of opinion: the studio (in this case Fox) the network programming people, and the network standards and practices department. As you try to satisfy all those different viewpoints, shows sometimes get very watered down and silly. One reason *thirtysomething* is so successful is because the network has left its producers alone to do their thing. Hire responsible, creative people and then let them be.

M&V: *How would you rate the overall handling of sex on TV?*

Wakefield: I think television is somewhat more responsible in its treatment of sexual issues than the general run of movies, and certainly more so than the general run of pop-rock music entertainment. It has to be, because it's in the home. The networks are aware of that. Any kid can go out and buy a record, but in the home the parents also get a vote.

M&V: *Speaking of* thirtysomething, *how would you script Hope and Michael educating their daughter about sex when she gets older?*

Wakefield: I feel I don't have to suggest how they should deal with that because I know how they'll do it. When I look at *thirtysomething* I don't see twisted values. I don't see lies and distortions. I see real reflections of human behavior in a contemporary setting. If they deal that way with each other, they'll deal that way with their daughter.

Prime-Time Girls Just Want To Have Fun

By Sally Steenland

Samantha loves to shop and does almost nothing else. Heather spends most of her time on the family couch reading magazines and talking about cosmetics, and Lynn, an attractive and energetic young woman, feels ugly and depressed because her boyfriend danced several dances with another blond cheerleader.

These adolescent girls do not appear to be very well-rounded individuals preparing to become adults. Fortunately, they are not real young women approaching adulthood but are characters on the popular shows, *Who's the Boss?*, *Mr. Belvedere* and *Alf*, respectively, where they are seen by millions of girls each week.

Of the more than 200 television programs I monitored for *Growing Up in Prime Time: An Analysis of Adolescent Girls on Television*, a 1988 study, not one revealed a single program devoted to any female character's academic activities or career plans as a major part of the plot. This lack of attention is especially glaring since nearly half of adolescent females on TV appear in school settings. Because of these missed opportunities, regular viewers are more likely to be familiar with their favorite female character's taste in fashion than her intellectual aptitude.

Instead of school and career plans, TV's teens are preoccupied with shopping, grooming and dating. Considering that close to one million adolescent girls watch prime-time network television programs every night, television's adolescent female characters are important role models for teenage viewers and are able to influence attitudes and behavior. However, their portrayals are both narrow and unrealistic. Teenage viewers see their counterparts on the screen poised for professional careers and productive adulthoods, but viewers rarely catch a glimpse of the steps one must take to achieve those goals.

Young women in high school today will spend more than 30 years of their adult lives in the work force, and almost half of today's teenage girls will be the sole support of their families for at least part of their adult lives. In comparing the episodic world with reality, one finds huge differences, for example:

- All of TV's adolescent females plan to attend college, and only a few hold part-time jobs during the school year. Yet government statistics show that only three women in five enter college after high school and 53 percent of all high-school females who are working age have jobs.
- In the prime-time world, more than four out of five young women are from middle-class families, while in actuality only 38 percent live in families with incomes between $20,000 and $40,000 and one third come from households with incomes below $20,000.
- On TV, almost three-quarters of the adolescents have mothers with professional careers, while in the real work world only 24 percent of the women are professional.

There are glimmers of hope, where sporadic attention is paid to the academic ability and occupational future of TV's adolescent characters (Carol on *Growing Pains*, Vanessa on *The Cosby Show*, and the female students on *A Different World*). But by failing to provide even a rudimentary bridge between the worlds of adolescence and adulthood, television misses their continuity—and ignores some of the most important aspects of growing up.

The full report is available from the National Commission on Working Women of Wider Opportunities for Women, 1325 G St., N.W., Lower Level, Washington, DC 20005, $5 prepaid. Sally Steenland is a freelance writer based in Washington, DC.

Media&Values' *Managing Editor Kerry Gerot assisted with research for this article during her earlier tenure as an intern.*

—From "Redesigning Women,"
Media&Values *No. 49, Winter 1989.*

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MUKTUK AND MASS MEDIA:
TV Separates Elders From Children

By Eric Gabster

Originally appeared in "Cultures Under Siege." Media&Values *No. 32, Summer, 1985.*

Few experiences penetrate memory as thoroughly as Arctic winds pierce unprotected flesh. In Alaska, images of communication technology reshaping the lives of subsistence Inuit, or Eskimo, peoples can burn and numb like frostbite.

During the three years as a Jesuit Volunteer at KNOM-AM, an educationally based, public service radio station in Nome, Alaska, I had frequent opportunity to observe the metamorphosis of Inuit culture, and the role played in that shift by the instruments of mass communication.

On journalistic expeditions to some of the 90 villages served by KNOM's signal I would fly into a world that, from the air, seemed forgotten by time, a few dwellings huddled in a frigid, endless expanse of whiteness, where the primary language is a dialect of Inuit, where polar bear hides dry among whale bones and where walrus-skin boats perched above snowdrifts await the spring hunt as they have for countless generations.

While landing on a bumpy stretch of ice, the primitive scene would inevitably shatter amid the realities of this century. Each scattered outpost sports an enormous satellite dish aimed low to the southern horizon, snow machines noisily bounce out to the plane to retrieve passengers and mail, and the ride to the village reveals evidences of a commercially-oriented, product-dependent society—aluminum boats with massive engines, high-powered rifles, parkas

PHOTOGRAPH BY KIRK CONDYLES/IMPACT VISUALS

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from catalogues, discarded oil drums, beer cans, and Twinkie wrappers.

As a non-commercial station KNOM does not encourage product orientation, but its 10,000-watt signal is not the only media presence in western Alaska. Commercial radio has been broadcasting for years, and satellites dish up everything from state-sponsored news to prime time entertainment. By the early 1980s some villages were transmitting their own low-power television, and most village high schools have long screened feature films.

The elders know that one day their songs will not be sung and the dances explaining an enchanted past will die with them.

This rapid enculturation from the tribal hunting society of a few generations ago to the 20th century world of high technology has produced an anthropological nightmare. In the same dwelling three generations often coexist with the same heritage, but separated by worlds of different experience and expectation. In an Eskimo's home one can find older generations plying traditional skills of ivory carving, skin sewing, and food preservation (including muktuk, or whale meat) while younger adults jerryrig snow machine engines, and children are absorbed in *The Dukes of Hazzard* as they devour junk food and sodas.

The discontinuity of these images intensifies when one realizes that the loss of traditional subsistence lifestyle and the diminished use of Inuit dialects parallels increased use of modern communication technologies. Cultural shifts accelerated incredibly in the last decade along with the arrival of television, cable and satellite images that gave a hunting/gathering culture the power and immediacy of the information age. Nevertheless, to assign a causative role in this cultural transformation to the instruments of mass communication would be an oversimplification.

The Inuit first contacted the "outside" (still a term of reference) through Russian fur traders and American whalers during the last century. These emissaries came from a world of industrial wonder that could make rugged Arctic existence more tolerable. They also left behind new diseases and the seeds of today's plague of alcoholism.

If the world beyond the waters was filled with the materials of convenience, it also contained commercialism and greed. The Gold Rush proved that.

For the most part, the Inuit could maintain their own existence, on their own lands, even after Alaska became part of the U.S. But the challenge of a new frontier brought missionaries, teachers, and those who scrape riches off virgin territory.

Then in the early 1970s the federal government granted vast sums of money to Inuit groups as a settlement for "acquisition" of Inuit land a century earlier. In the same decade the Alaskan pipeline bloated state coffers. Dollars fell like snow, and these new Americans unknowingly awoke to the American Dream.

That was the process of cultural imperialism. The "outside" provided goodies of industrialization, and the means to acquire them. Television and satellites only framed the picture by delivering seductive images of a product-oriented society.

There is a deep sense of pain and loss among the elders. It shows in their faces, in darkened skin and lines drawn by years of arid coldness. One day soon they know their songs will not be sung, and dances explaining an enchanted past will die along with them, no matter how many videotapes record them today.

Yet, they too are glad for the storm warnings that come by radio, along with messages from relatives in distant villages.

The progression to more efficient communication technologies and the use of more durable goods seems inevitable, but its hectic encroachment into the previously simple lives of Alaska's Inuit population has robbed the Eskimo of generations of social development, dressing the children of whale hunters in the stylized shallowness of a mass-mediated generation.

Eric Gabster is a former TV producer who now sells fruit and produce. He is thinking of ways to use media educationally to increase consumption of these healthy products.

World Market Is New Reality

By Keval Kumar

Satellite and cable communications are in the process of internationalizing the mass media. Dish antennas and cable links are already bringing American news and sitcoms directly into homes in Europe, and the video revolution in Asia and Africa has made the latest Hollywood films more easily available than local productions. National governments with carefully nurtured public broadcasting systems compete with media originating across the border.

Thus the struggle of developing countries to counter cultural imperialism through a free and balanced flow of information between the affluent and the poor countries has been all but lost, despite a few brave efforts. Transnational commercial interests have taken over satellite channels, and it is only a matter of time before the global marketplace (very different from McLuhan's vision of a global village) becomes a reality.

The marketplace orientation of international media programs may make the minorities of industrialized countries even less visible than they are now. Mainstream cultures are not likely to promote pluralism in the images they beam around the world. Indeed, stereotypes that present minorities will be further reinforced.

We need not, however, overreact to these portraits. Fortunately, the children and young people who are most susceptible to media are also influenced by many other contacts and activities. But they need to be educated in the pitfalls and bigotry inherent in media stereotypes as well. Young people must develop this critical awareness to become discriminating viewers.

Only then can they bring pressure to bear on the national and transnational merchants of the media, voting with their dials, and maybe consumer movements and boycotts for media that reflect their ethnic makeup and culture.

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—From "Ethnic Diversity," Media&Values *No. 43, Spring 1988.*

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ALL IN THE FAMILY:
How To transform a TV Takeover

By Barbara Osborn

When TV was introduced in the late 1940s, the upscale lifestyle magazine *Better Homes & Gardens* looked into the future and predicted that television would become a member of the family. Fifty years later, 98 percent of American households have welcomed television into their homes. Families spend more time with TV (an average of just over seven hours a day) than they do anything else but working and sleeping. Still, few people stop to examine when TV crosses the line from companion to intruder.

Its development has been gradual so we don't always notice it, but TV has established an almost human presence in our homes. We talk about television characters as if we knew them, and TV programs reflect our lives and our problems. *Better Homes & Gardens* was right. TV is a member of the family. It keeps us company when we're alone, entertains us when we have nothing to do, and relaxes us after a hard day's work.

An unparalleled window on the world, television introduces us to faraway scenes, new concepts and ideas. Properly used, it is the most powerful educational device ever invented, with lessons to teach about human interactions, science and literature, history and current events. It can even provide us with instruction on human behavior and how to act. But much of what we learn is up to us. And there lies the major challenge of fulfilling television's potential.

Much of the downside of television, the side that makes us view it with ambivalence and distrust, is most visible in the family setting.

Use of multiple sets by different family members can increase individual isolation. Even families who view together have to struggle against the tendency to retreat into their separate media cocoons as TV's wave washes over them.

ILLUSTRATION BY TOM HERZBERG

With the skyrocketing number of single-parent and two wage-earning parent families, people rely more and more on TV to supervise their children. Despite its inherent educational potential, typical TV programming offers kids an easy way out when they're bored. Despite its learning potential, most typical programming fails to challenge children or engage their imagination. It opens windows on new worlds, but also introduces them to an adult world they may not be prepared to deal with.

Even dinnertime, the traditional family catchup period, has been transformed by TV, with many families eating their way through the evening meal in silence as they watch the set. In fact, *American Demographics* reports that 41 percent of adults don't talk with other family members during the course of an entire evening. Meanwhile, family conflicts go unresolved, as parents and children, grateful for the distraction of the TV set, leave matters unspoken.

But it doesn't have to be this way. With the right techniques and a little assertiveness, most viewers can learn to turn the tables on television by learning to recognize—and break—patterns of avoidance. You can begin this process by working through the scripts on the next page with friends and family members. Your interactive participations can be the first step in claiming and changing your relationship with TV.

Barbara Osborn is a media literacy teacher and freelance journalist in Los Angeles.

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REFLECTION RESOURCE

Snapshots From a TV Album

Working with friends or family members, assign roles and act out the scripts below.

Script1:

"Can We Talk?"

***Wife*:** What are we going to do about the bills, honey?
***Husband*:** I don't know what to do. I don't have the answers. *(Goes to the TV as if to turn it on.)*
***Wife*:** Please don't turn on the TV now.
***Husband*:** *(Turning set on)* I really want to watch this show. *(Watches over-intently, says nothing.)*
***Wife*:** I want to get this settled and I can't talk to you if you're watching TV.
***Husband*:** Look, I'm tired. I worked all day. I want to relax.
***Wife*:** But when are we going to figure this out?
***Husband*:** Please. Can't you see I'm trying to watch?

Script 2:

"I Was Watching That."

(A teenage boy sits in front of the TV set.)
Dad: Haven't you watched enough TV for today?
Son: Dad, I like this show.
Dad: Maybe you should get some exercise.
Son: *(irritated)* Dad, I'm trying to watch.
Dad: Have you finished your homework?
Son: *(doesn't respond)*
Dad: *(getting frustrated)* You've been watching all afternoon.
Why do you watch those shows? They're terrible.
(The boy's sister enters and changes the channel.)
Son: Hey, I was watching that.
Daughter: That's a stupid show.
Son: Dad, she just changed the channel!
Dad: You shouldn't be watching that show anyway.
Son: But I don't have anything else to do.

Discuss your reactions.

- What aspects of your own family's behavior do you recognize in the skits?
- How does your family viewing fit around other household activity?
- What do your family members get out of their TV viewing? When does TV viewing block communication between family members?
- How could each scene have been handled differently? Can you suggest how you might turn this into a positive interaction in the context of your family?

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Media&Values magazine is a project of The Center for Media and Values, a not-for-profit educational membership organization which empowers the public by providing resources for critical awareness about media. Membership in the Center is $95/yr for organizations, or $30/yr for individuals.
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20 BEST BOOKS ABOUT TELEVISION

Resources for Follow-up

The following books are those which the Center for Media and Values has found to be the most valuable and important resources for teachers and leaders about television and society.

The Looking Glass World of Nonfiction TV by Elayne Rapping uncovers common messages carried by news, game shows, talk shows, commercials and other programs (1987). South End Press, P.O. Box 7816, Edison, NJ 08818-7816; (908)225-1900, $9.

Television and America's Children: A Crisis of Neglect. Edward Palmer points out the untapped educational potential of television (1988). Oxford U. Press, 201 Evans Road, Cary, NC 27513-2009, (800)451-7556, $8.95.

Television: The Critical View, 3rd Edition. Horace Newcomb collects some of the finest writings about television (1982). Oxford U. Press; $9.95.

Boxed In: The Culture of TV 20 essays by Mark Crispin Miller comprise an unusual study of the American media spectacle (1988). Northwestern U. Press, 625 Colfax St., Evanston, IL 60201; (312)491-5313, $14.95.

Target: Prime Time: Advocacy Groups and the Struggle Over Entertainment explores the influence advocacy groups have on what viewers see on network television. By Kathryn Montgomery (1989). Oxford U. Press; $22.50.

Mass Media Religion: The Social Sources of the Electronic Church, Stewart Hoover presents the findings of his five-year study of the "electronic churches" and how members' beliefs change (1988). Sage, 2455 Teller Rd., Newbury Park, CA 91320; (805)499-0721, $21.95.

No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior. Joshua Meyrowitz looks at how television's presence in our lives leaves us without a "sense of place" (1985). Oxford U. Press; $10.95.

Prime-Time Television: Content and Control, Second Edition, examines how political and social circumstances influence the content of television, by Muriel G. Cantor and Joel M. Cantor (1991). Sage; $13.95.

World Families Watch Television, edited by James Lull, creates a forum for critical questioning of the roles of television viewing in households worldwide (1988). Sage; $16.95.

The Medium is the Message is Marshall McLuhan's classic look at how electric technology reshapes and restructures patterns of social interdependence (1967). Bantam Books, Bantam Doubleday Dell, 666 5th Ave., New York, NY 10103; (800)223-6834. Look for this classic in your local library.

Raymond Williams on Television: Selected Writings, a collection of this media philosopher's best writing. Edited by Alan O'Connor (1989). Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 29 W. 35th St., New York, NY 10001; (212)244-6412, $14.95.

Television and Religion: The Shaping of Faith, Values and Culture, by William F. Fore, offers an analysis of the implicit values and cultural significance of secular television programming (1987). Fortress Publications, 426 S. 5th St., Minneapolis, MN 55440; (800)328-4648, $11.95.

Television in America, Second Edition, discusses the political, social and economic forces shaping television, and the historical development of programming as well as technology. By George Comstock (1991). Sage; $13.95.

Big World, Small Screen: The Role of Television in American Society—a report of the American Psychological Association. Aletha C. Huston, et al (1992). Nebraska U. Press, 901 N. 17th St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0520; (800)755-1105, $25.

Watching Television: A Pantheon Guide to Popular Culture is an excellent series of essays on television issues edited by Todd Gitlin (1986). Pantheon, Random House, 400 Hahn Rd., Westminster, MD 21157; (800) 733-3000, $11.95.

Prime Time Families by Ella Taylor. How TV families over the decades have reflected and shaped our understanding of family life (1989). U. of California Press, 2223 Fulton St., Berkeley, CA 94720; (415)642-1170, $11.95.

The Age of Missing Information provides a comparison of TV "knowledge" and what we can learn from the real world of nature and people. Bill McKibben (1992). Random House; $20.

Classic Research Reports

The following studies, although dated, continue to provide baseline research about TV issues. Look for them in your local library.

Window Dressing On the Set: Women and Minorities in Television, by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, provided base line research on employment patterns as well as portrayal and stereotyping (1977). Update, 1979.

"...To Form a More Perfect Union...": Justice for American Women, by the National Commission on the Observance of the International Women's Year, set up guidelines for the portrayal of women in film, television and advertising (1976).

Violence and the Media: A Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, by R. K. Baker and S. J. Ball for the Surgeon General (1969), a classic study of the impact of violence in the media.

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LIVING WITH TELEVISION: *Where We Go From Here*

Any reader who has read or even glanced through the previous 39 pages of this magazine can hardly fail to be impressed with the wealth of thinking, action suggestions and reflections that represent the best of our television criticism and analysis over the past 15 years.

As activities and commentary, they stand alone. But as a means of actually dealing with the impact of TV in our lives, the articles in this issue are barely a beginning. Just thinking or reading about television is only the first step toward media literacy. True media literacy results primarily from a process in which the media-aware individual moves along a continuum from criticism to empowerment.

Taking control of television is an essential mission for the 21st Century.

This progression culminates in the ability to question not just the media one hears and sees, but the system that produces them as well. Media-literate television consumers, for example, recognize that television supports itself not so much by advertising products to viewers, but by selling viewer time to advertisers. We call it "renting eyeballs." But they also understand that in a democratic society the challenge to change such a system requires changing the way we all watch and use television. To move from passive to interactive and aware consumers will be a "small step" for each person, but a giant leap for humankind.

Ultimately, this awareness has far-reaching implications. But such revolutionary consciousness doesn't come easily. And it is particularly hard to achieve when dealing with television because we take our "friend in the living room" so much for granted.

As longtime media theorist and researcher George Gerbner, dean emeritus of the Annenberg School for Communication/ University of Pennsylvania, said recently, "Taking a close look at television is like looking at your neighborhood. It's so familiar you can't really see it. To 'see' it differently, you need a different perspective, like getting in a plane and flying over it."

TV Alert: A Wake-up Guide to Television Literacy, the companion Media Literacy Workshop Kit™, is designed to further our "flyover" look at television. Using the established principles of media literacy education, it provides process-oriented activities to become more television-literate around issues like TV violence, stereotyping, sexuality, the news and more. Its eight learning modules provide a catalyst for teachers, group leaders, even concerned parents, searching for tools to help people challenge—and change—the impact of television in their day-to-day lives.

With its interactive, workshop-centered process, this Kit continues our series of practical yet exciting workshop kits for promoting media literacy education on a variety of media-related subjects.

But this method for media literacy didn't arise casually. Based initially on the principles of activist educator Paulo Freire, it was also strongly influenced by English media theorist Len Masterman and other leaders of the worldwide media education movement.

Indeed, one of our most exciting discoveries of the past few years was just that: we are not alone. From Scotland to Australia, Toulouse to Manila, we've discovered a world of educators struggling to define and shape both our personal and communal relationships with media.

The media literacy movement in the United States is also growing, and the Center for Media and Values is on the leading edge of that growth. In addition to every issue of *Media&Values* magazine, individuals, groups and organizations who become members receive the most up-to-date information on the Center's products, programs and connections. (For information on how to become a member or order Center resources see the adjoining inside back cover.)

Taking control of television and the other media that influence our lives is an essential mission for the 21st Century. It's clear that whatever the new millenium brings, media, and especially television, will continue be a vehicle for human interaction. But will that interaction be active or passive? Will television be our servant or our ruler? Will it become a true window on the world, or will it remain the shill selling us a bill of goods? Will it help heal the world...or destroy it?

The media literacy movement can help us all develop positive answers to these questions. We invite you to join us.

I Hate it But I Love it: Television and Listerine

Even though we sometimes hate TV, like Listerine, we also love it. And more importantly we have gotten used to it. It has not only taken over our living rooms, but our lives. We wake up and go to bed by the *Today* show and the late night news. We pattern our habits of eating around it. We count on it as a dependable ice breaker . . . "Did you happen to see that TV show last night about . . ." In some schools, teachers even assign it for homework.

What is this 'thing' which has intruded itself so totally on our society in less than a lifetime? How do we cope with human life in which the common values no longer seem to be established by the Ten Commandments, but by hundreds of thousands of TV commercials?

43 — *From* Media&Values *No. 1, Fall, 1977.*

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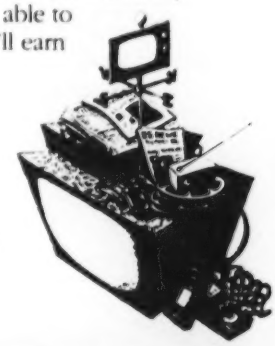

Personal Membership — $30.00 /year For individual teachers/leaders. Receive each issue of *Media&Values* plus discounts and other member benefits.

Organizational Membership — $95.00 /year For schools, churches and community-centered organizations. Receive each issue of *Media&Values* plus its Media Literacy Workshop Kit™ including leader's guide, handout masters, occasional videos and license to reprint. Also discounts and other member benefits.

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- ❑ ***Citizenship in a Media Age.*** Twelve learning modules on media and the political process. $24.95 _____
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Would you give up your TV for a million dollars?

Twenty-five percent of people say, "no." Clearly television has become an essential part of many of our lives. It entertains us. It connects us to people around the world. It exposes us to new ideas. At the same time, the worst of TV can isolate and distract, trivialize and titillate. In less than a lifetime, it has transformed the way we talk and dress, what we think is important and how we view the world around us.

The time has come to think again about what we can do to challenge—and change—our relationship with television.

TV Alert: A Wakeup Guide to Television Literacy *is a practical Media Literacy Workshop Kit™ packed with ideas and activities to help classes and groups recognize the subtle impact of TV in everyday life. Eight learning modules, with accompanying handout masters, explore the questions and topics named most often as concerns about television:*

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"...the most useful tools available for sorting out the media images, ideas and values that swirl around us each day."

— Utne Reader